AMAR CHITRA KATHA

RAM IN EXILE

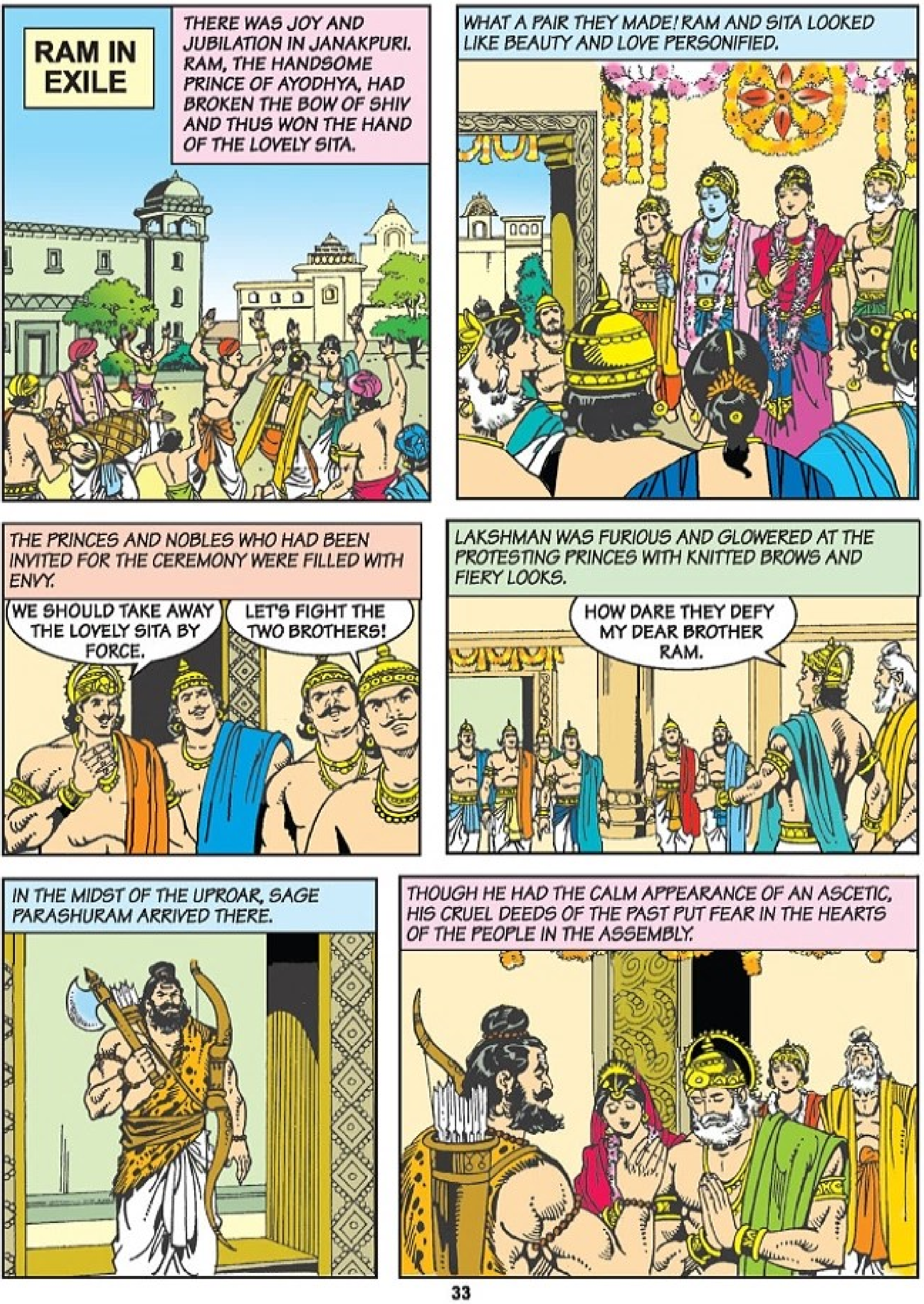
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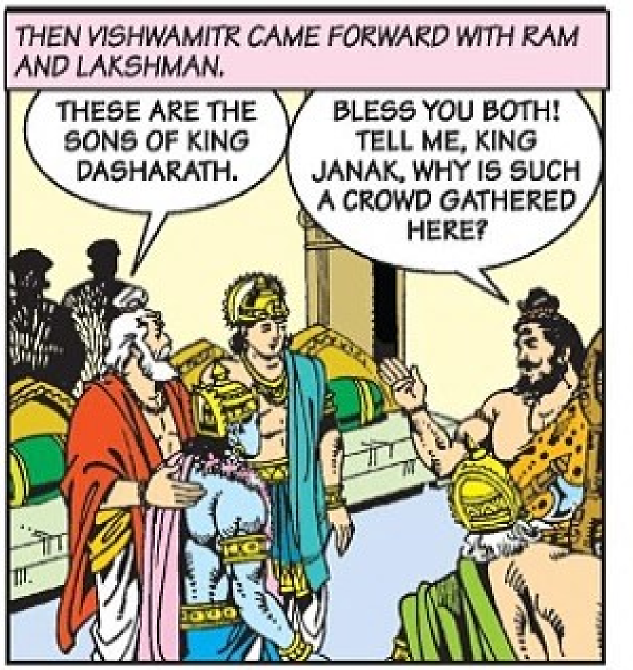


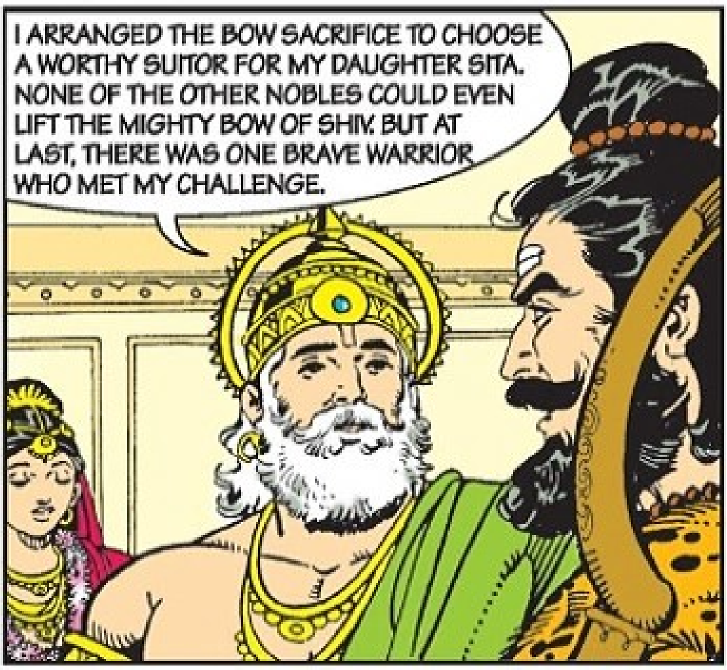
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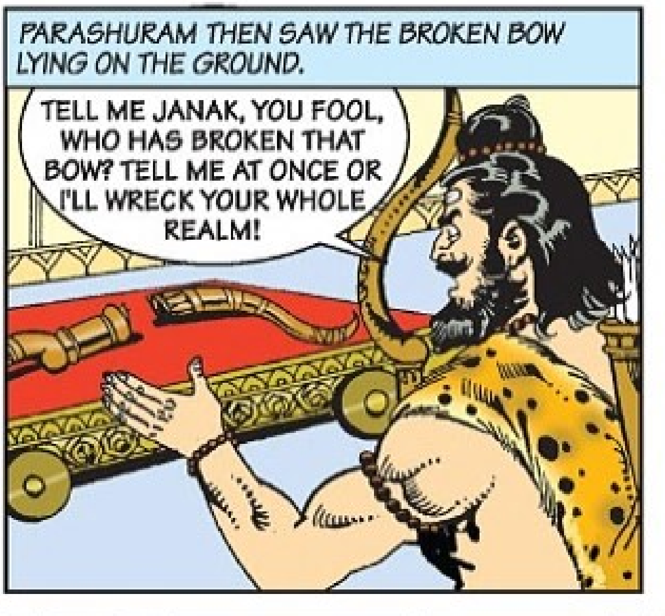
Who becomes the king will make no difference to me. I am a servent, can i be the Queen?

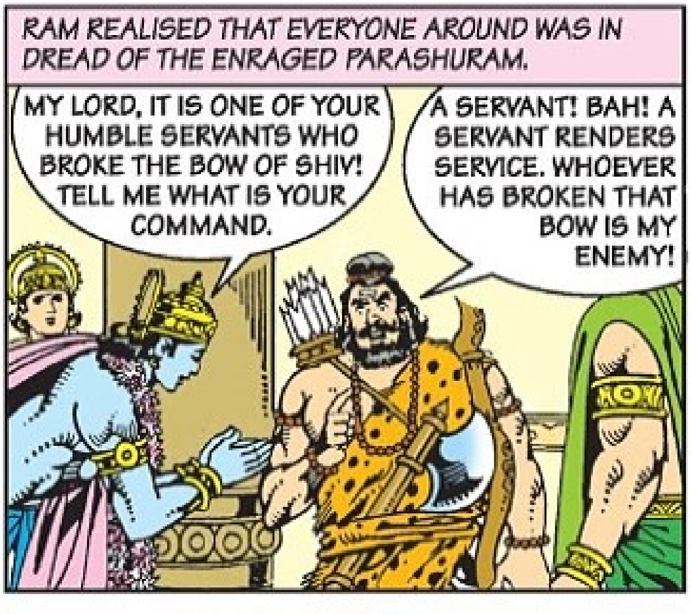



RAM IN EXILE
THERE WAS JOY AND JUBILATION IN JANAKPURI. RAM, THE HANDSOME PRINCE OF AYODHYA, HAD BROKEN THE BOW OF SHIV AND THUS WON THE HAND OF THE LOVELY SITA.
WHAT A PAIR THEY MADE! RAM AND SITA LOOKED LIKE BEAUTY AND LOVE PERSONIFIED.
THE PRINCES AND NOBLES WHO HAD BEEN INVITED FOR THE CEREMONY WERE FILLED WITH ENVY.
WE SHOULD TAKE AWAY THE LOVELY SITA BY FORCE.
LET'S FIGHT THE TWO BROTHERS!
LAKSHMAN WAS FURIOUS AND GLOWERED AT THE PROTESTING PRINCES WITH KNITTED BROWS AND FIERY LOOKS.
HOW DARE THEY DEFY MY DEAR BROTHER RAM.
IN THE MIDST OF THE UPROAR, SAGE PARASHURAM ARRIVED THERE.
THOUGH HE HAD THE CALM APPEARANCE OF AN ASCETIC, HIS CRUEL DEEDS OF THE PAST PUT FEAR IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE IN THE ASSEMBLY.


THEN VISHWAMITR CAME FORWARD WITH RAM AND LAKSHMAN.
THESE ARE THE SONS OF KING DASHARATH.
BLESS YOU BOTH! TELL ME, KING JANAK, WHY IS SUCH A CROWD GATHERED HERE?


I ARRANGED THE BOW SACRIFICE TO CHOOSE A WORTHY SUITOR FOR MY DAUGHTER SITA. NONE OF THE OTHER NOBLES COULD EVEN LIFT THE MIGHTY BOW OF SHIV. BUT AT LAST, THERE WAS ONE BRAVE WARRIOR WHO MET MY CHALLENGE.


PARASHURAM THEN SAW THE BROKEN BOW LYING ON THE GROUND.
TELL ME JANAK, YOU FOOL, WHO HAS BROKEN THAT BOW? TELL ME AT ONCE OR I'LL WRECK YOUR WHOLE REALM!

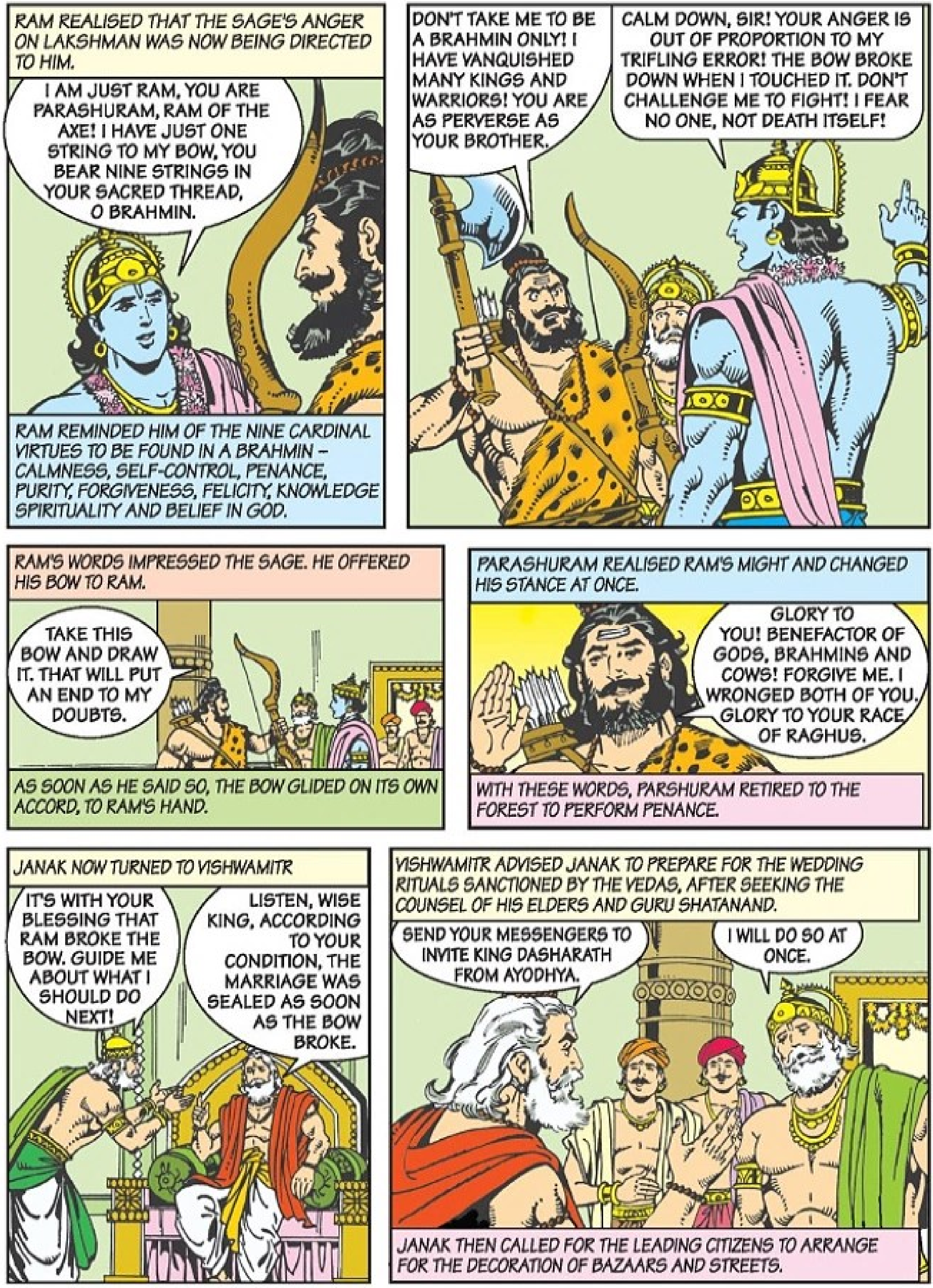

RAM REALISED THAT EVERYONE AROUND WAS IN DREAD OF THE ENRAGED PARASHURAM.
MY LORD, IT IS ONE OF YOUR HUMBLE SERVANTS WHO BROKE THE BOW OF SHIV! TELL ME WHAT IS YOUR COMMAND.
A SERVANT! BAH! A SERVANT RENDERS SERVICE. WHOEVER HAS BROKEN THAT BOW IS MY ENEMY!

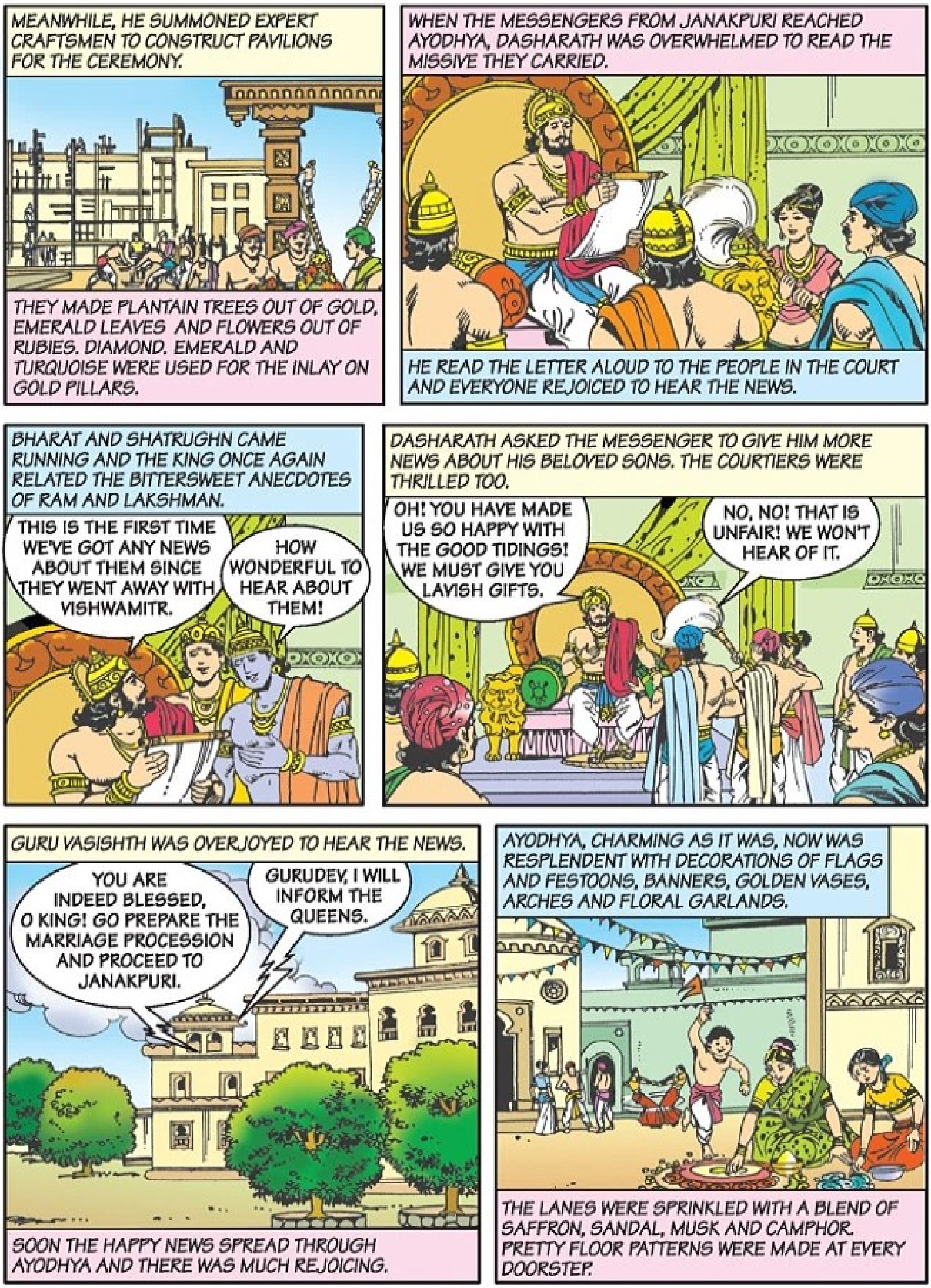

LET HIM STEP FORWARD! ELSE, I WILL SLAY ALL THE KINGS PRESENT HERE!

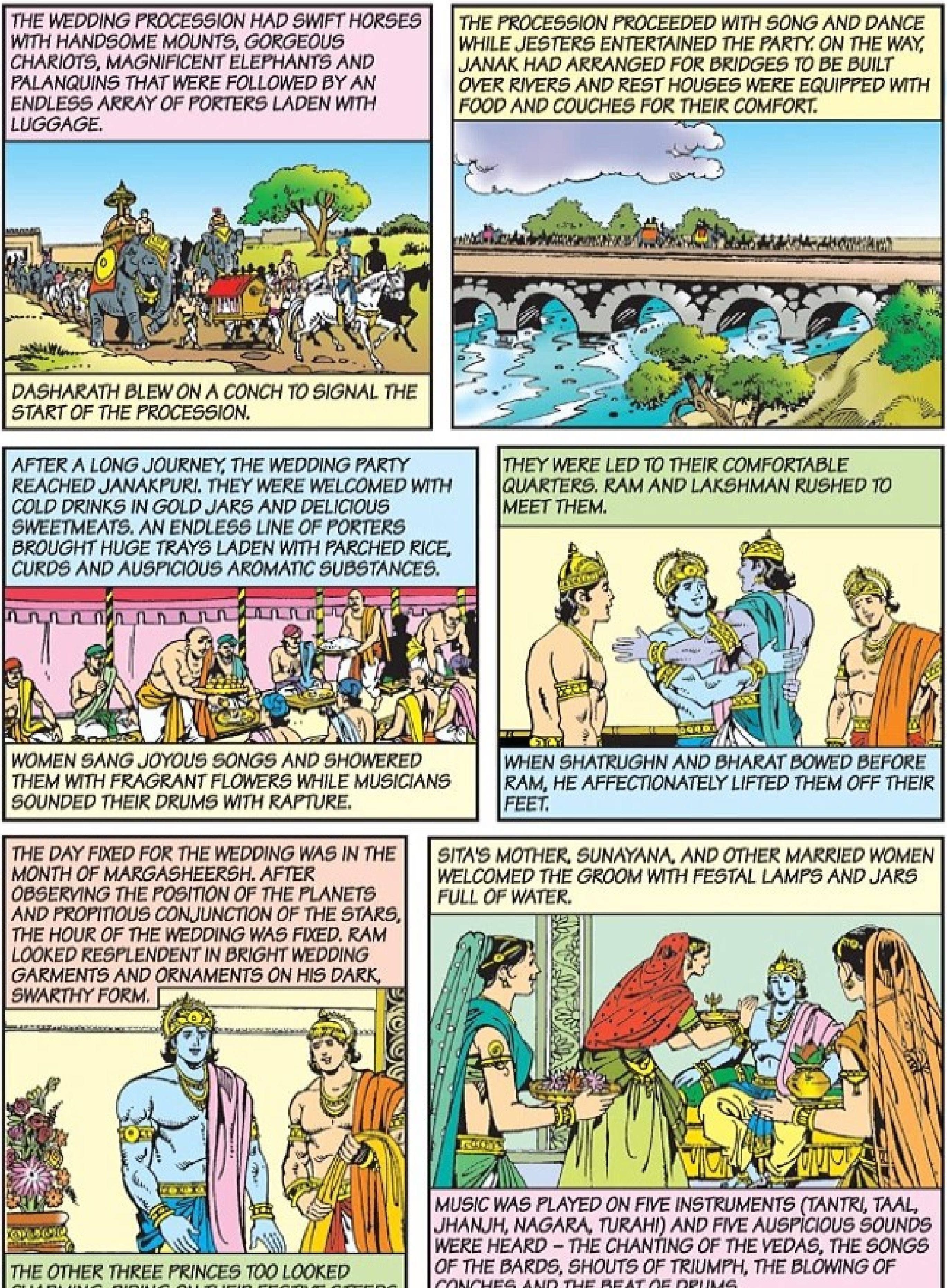

I'VE BROKEN LOTS OF BOWS IN MY CHILDHOOD! THAT DID NOT ANNOY YOU! WHAT IS YOUR ATTACHMENT TO THIS PARTICULAR BOW?
HAH! YOU PRINCELING! MIND YOUR WORDS! HOW CAN YOU COMPARE THE MIGHTY BOW OF SHIV TO ANYTHING ELSE!

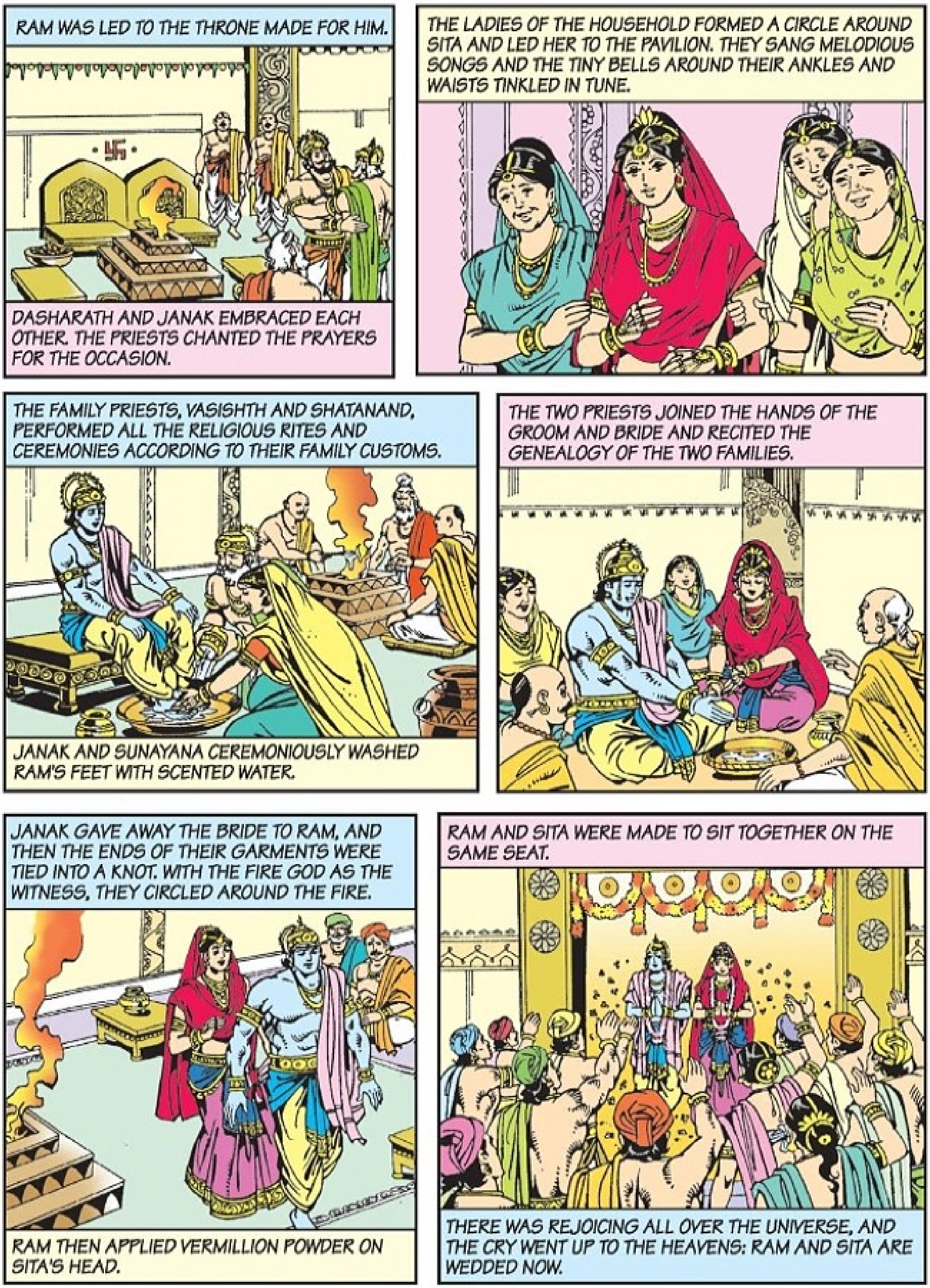

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE! THEY ALL LOOK ALIKE TO ME! WHAT GAIN OR LOSS CAN BE THERE IN BREAKING A WORN OUT OLD BOW? DON'T BLAME RAM. IT BROKE AS SOON AS HE TOUCHED IT! WHY ARE YOU SO ANGRY?
YOU FOOLISH CHILD! HAVE YOU NOT HEARD OF MY TEMPER?
PARASHURAM LIFTED HIS MIGHTY AXE ON HIS SHOULDER IN A THREATENING GESTURE.
I'LL SPARE YOUR LIFE SINCE YOU ARE A MERE CHILD. I AM A SWORN ENEMY OF THE WARRIOR RACE OF KSHATRIYS. I KILLED THE THOUSAND-ARMED SAHASRABAHU WITH THIS VERY AXE!
AHA! SO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS A GREAT WARRIOR! DON'T FLAUNT YOUR AXE AT ME! IT'S LIKE TRYING TO BLOW A MOUNTAIN WITH A PUFF OF YOUR BREATH!
IT'S BECAUSE I SAW THE SACRED THREAD ON YOU THAT I SUPPRESSED MY ANGER. IT IS AGAINST OUR FAMILY CODE TO OPPOSE GODS, BRAHMINS, DEVOTEES OF HARI* AND COWS.
EVEN IF YOU STRIKE ME, I WILL FALL AT YOUR FEET. YOUR WORDS STRIKE LIKE A MILLION THUNDERBOLTS. YOU DON'T NEED TO BE ARMED WITH AN AXE OR BOW! FORGIVE ME, O GREAT SAGE, IF I HAVE SAID ANYTHING UNSEEMLY.
SAGE PARASHURAM TURNED TO VISHWAMITR IN ANGER.
THIS BOY IS STUPID AND PERVERSE! HE'S A BLOT ON THE RESPLENDENT SOLAR RACE! HE'S RECKLESS, UNRULY, IDIOTIC! DON'T BLAME ME IF HE'S DEAD IN A MATTER OF MINUTES! IF YOU WANT TO SAVE HIM, TELL HIM ABOUT MY GLORY, MY MIGHT AND MY FURY.
IT'S UNBECOMING OF YOU TO POUR OUT ABUSES, HOLY ONE! HEROES SHOW THEIR PROWESS BY ACTION, NOT BY SELF ADVERTISEMENT.
PARDON HIM!
I WILL NOT SPARE HIM NOW! THIS SHARP-TONGUED BOY DESERVES TO DIE!
VISHWAMITR INTERVENED JUST IN TIME WHEN PARASHURAM BRANDISHED HIS AXE.

* VISHNU

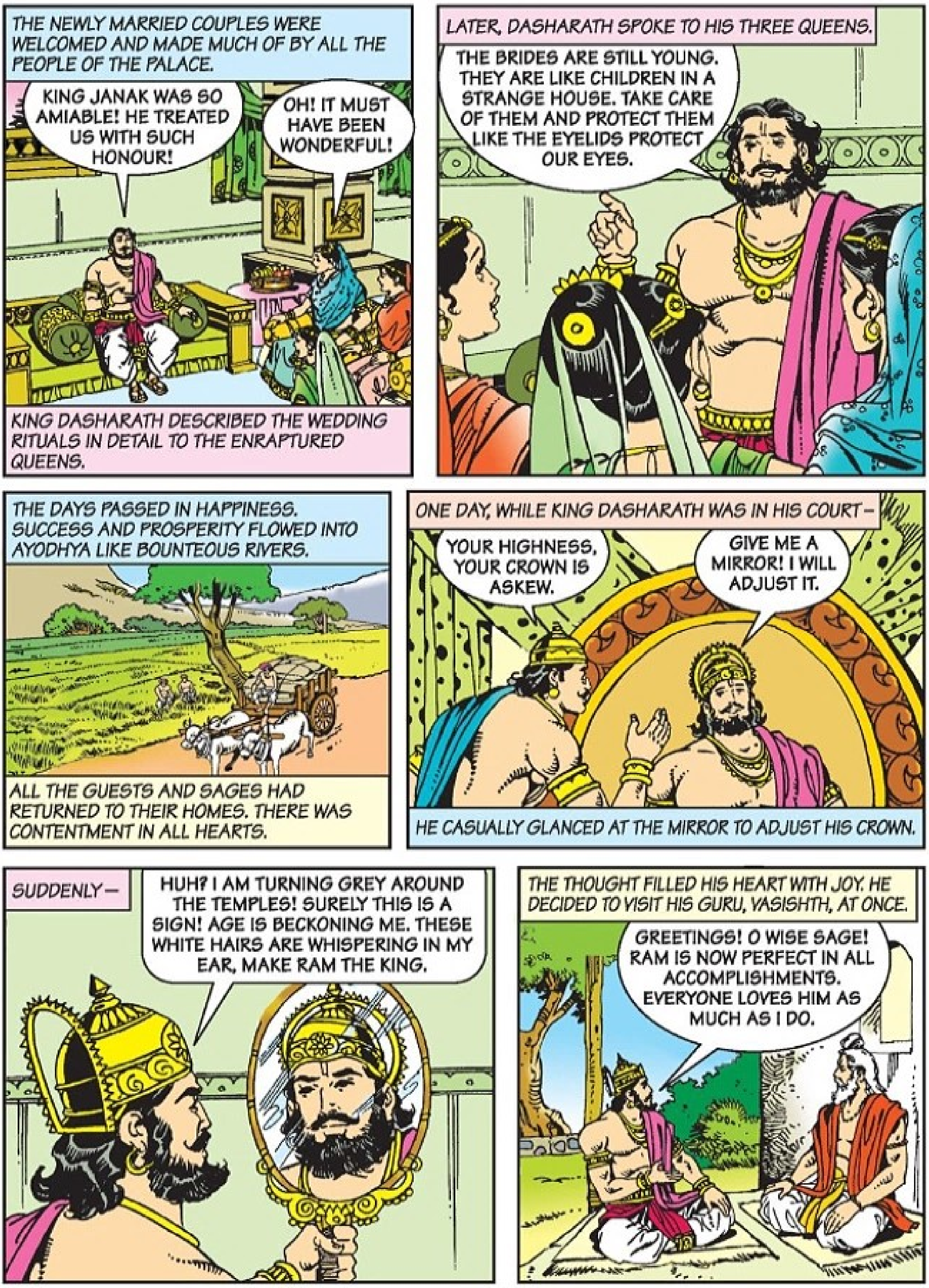

RAM REALISED THAT THE SAGE'S ANGER ON LAKSHMAN WAS NOW BEING DIRECTED TO HIM.
I AM JUST RAM, YOU ARE PARASHURAM, RAM OF THE AXE! I HAVE JUST ONE STRING TO MY BOW, YOU BEAR NINE STRINGS IN YOUR SACRED THREAD, O BRAHMIN.
RAM REMINDED HIM OF THE NINE CARDINAL VIRTUES TO BE FOUND IN A BRAHMIN – CALMNESS, SELF-CONTROL, PENANCE, PURITY, FORGIVENESS, FELICITY, KNOWLEDGE SPIRITUALITY AND BELIEF IN GOD.
DON'T TAKE ME TO BE A BRAHMIN ONLY! I HAVE VANQUISHED MANY KINGS AND WARRIORS! YOU ARE AS PERVERSE AS YOUR BROTHER.
CALM DOWN, SIR! YOUR ANGER IS OUT OF PROPORTION TO MY TRIFLING ERROR! THE BOW BROKE DOWN WHEN I TOUCHED IT. DON'T CHALLENGE ME TO FIGHT! I FEAR NO ONE, NOT DEATH ITSELF!
RAM'S WORDS IMPRESSED THE SAGE. HE OFFERED HIS BOW TO RAM.
TAKE THIS BOW AND DRAW IT. THAT WILL PUT AN END TO MY DOUBTS.
AS SOON AS HE SAID SO, THE BOW GLIDED ON ITS OWN ACCORD, TO RAM'S HAND.
PARASHURAM REALISED RAM'S MIGHT AND CHANGED HIS STANCE AT ONCE.
GLORY TO YOU! BENEFACTOR OF GODS, BRAHMINS AND COWS! FORGIVE ME. I WRONGED BOTH OF YOU. GLORY TO YOUR RACE OF RAGHUS.
WITH THESE WORDS, PARSHURAM RETIRED TO THE FOREST TO PERFORM PENANCE.
JANAK NOW TURNED TO VISHWAMITR
IT'S WITH YOUR BLESSING THAT RAM BROKE THE BOW. GUIDE ME ABOUT WHAT I SHOULD DO NEXT!
LISTEN, WISE KING, ACCORDING TO YOUR CONDITION, THE MARRIAGE WAS SEALED AS SOON AS THE BOW BROKE.
VISHWAMITR ADVISED JANAK TO PREPARE FOR THE WEDDING RITUALS SANCTIONED BY THE VEDAS, AFTER SEEKING THE COUNSEL OF HIS ELDERS AND GURU SHATANAND.
SEND YOUR MESSENGERS TO INVITE KING DASHARATH FROM AYODHYA.
I WILL DO SO AT ONCE.
JANAK THEN CALLED FOR THE LEADING CITIZENS TO ARRANGE FOR THE DECORATION OF BAZAARS AND STREETS.

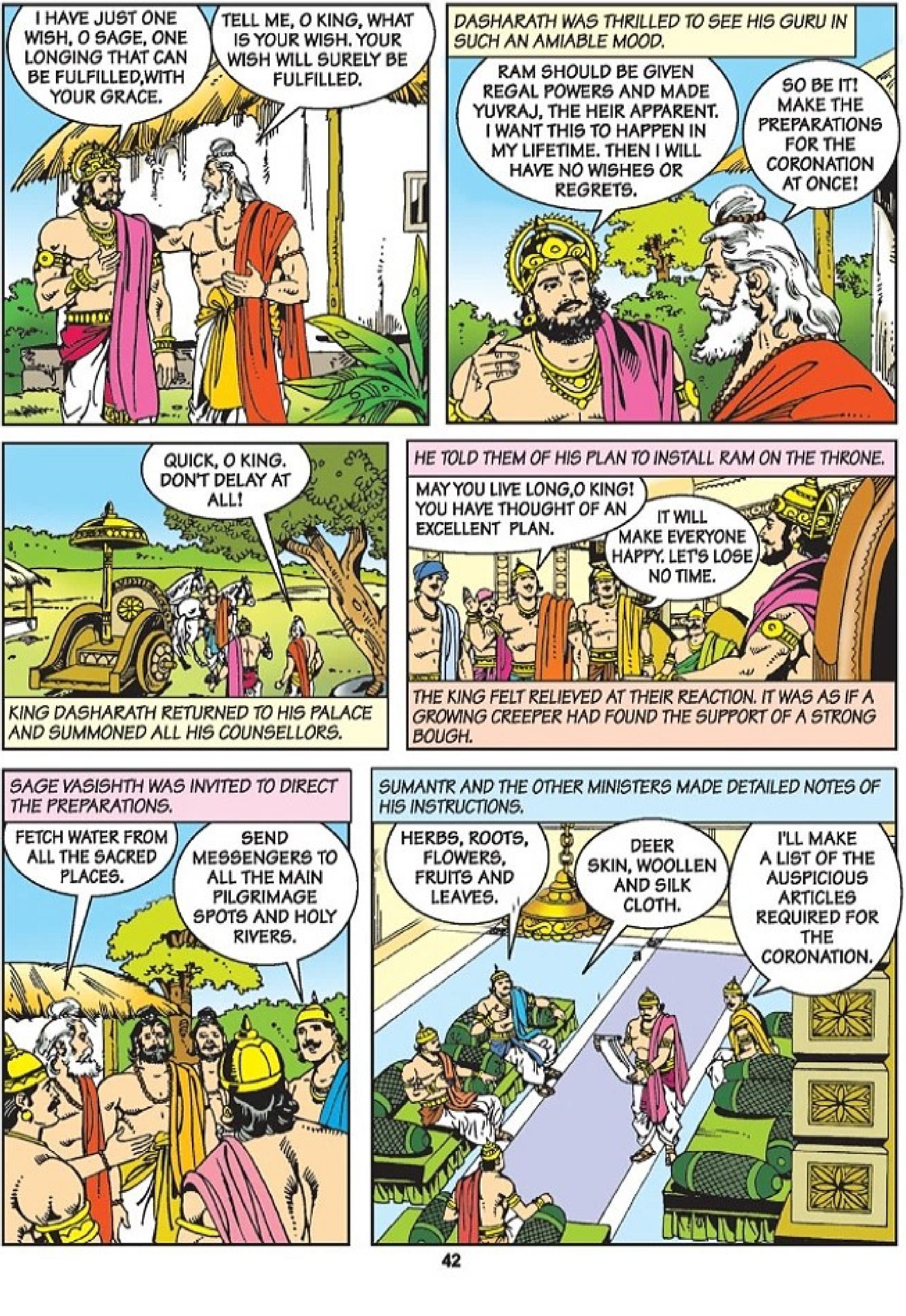

MEANWHILE, HE SUMMONED EXPERT CRAFTSMEN TO CONSTRUCT PAVILIONS FOR THE CEREMONY.
THEY MADE PLANTAIN TREES OUT OF GOLD, EMERALD LEAVES AND FLOWERS OUT OF RUBIES. DIAMOND. EMERALD AND TURQUOISE WERE USED FOR THE INLAY ON GOLD PILLARS.
WHEN THE MESSENGERS FROM JANAKPURI REACHED AYODHYA, DASHARATH WAS OVERWHELMED TO READ THE MISSIVE THEY CARRIED.
HE READ THE LETTER ALOUD TO THE PEOPLE IN THE COURT AND EVERYONE REJOICED TO HEAR THE NEWS.
BHARAT AND SHATRUGHN CAME RUNNING AND THE KING ONCE AGAIN RELATED THE BITTERSWEET ANECDOTES OF RAM AND LAKSHMAN.
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE'VE GOT ANY NEWS ABOUT THEM SINCE THEY WENT AWAY WITH VISHWAMITR.
HOW WONDERFUL TO HEAR ABOUT THEM!
DASHARATH ASKED THE MESSENGER TO GIVE HIM MORE NEWS ABOUT HIS BELOVED SONS. THE COURTIERS WERE THRILLED TOO.
OH! YOU HAVE MADE US SO HAPPY WITH THE GOOD TIDINGS! WE MUST GIVE YOU LAVISH GIFTS.
NO, NO! THAT IS UNFAIR! WE WON'T HEAR OF IT.
GURU VASISHTH WAS OVERJOYED TO HEAR THE NEWS.
YOU ARE INDEED BLESSED, O KING! GO PREPARE THE MARRIAGE PROCESSION AND PROCEED TO JANAKPURI.
GURUDEV, I WILL INFORM THE QUEENS.
SOON THE HAPPY NEWS SPREAD THROUGH AYODHYA AND THERE WAS MUCH REJOICING.
AYODHYA, CHARMING AS IT WAS, NOW WAS RESPLENDENT WITH DECORATIONS OF FLAGS AND FESTOONS, BANNERS, GOLDEN VASES, ARCHES AND FLORAL GARLANDS.
THE LANES WERE SPRINKLED WITH A BLEND OF SAFFRON, SANDAL, MUSK AND CAMPHOR. PRETTY FLOOR PATTERNS WERE MADE AT EVERY DOORSTEP.

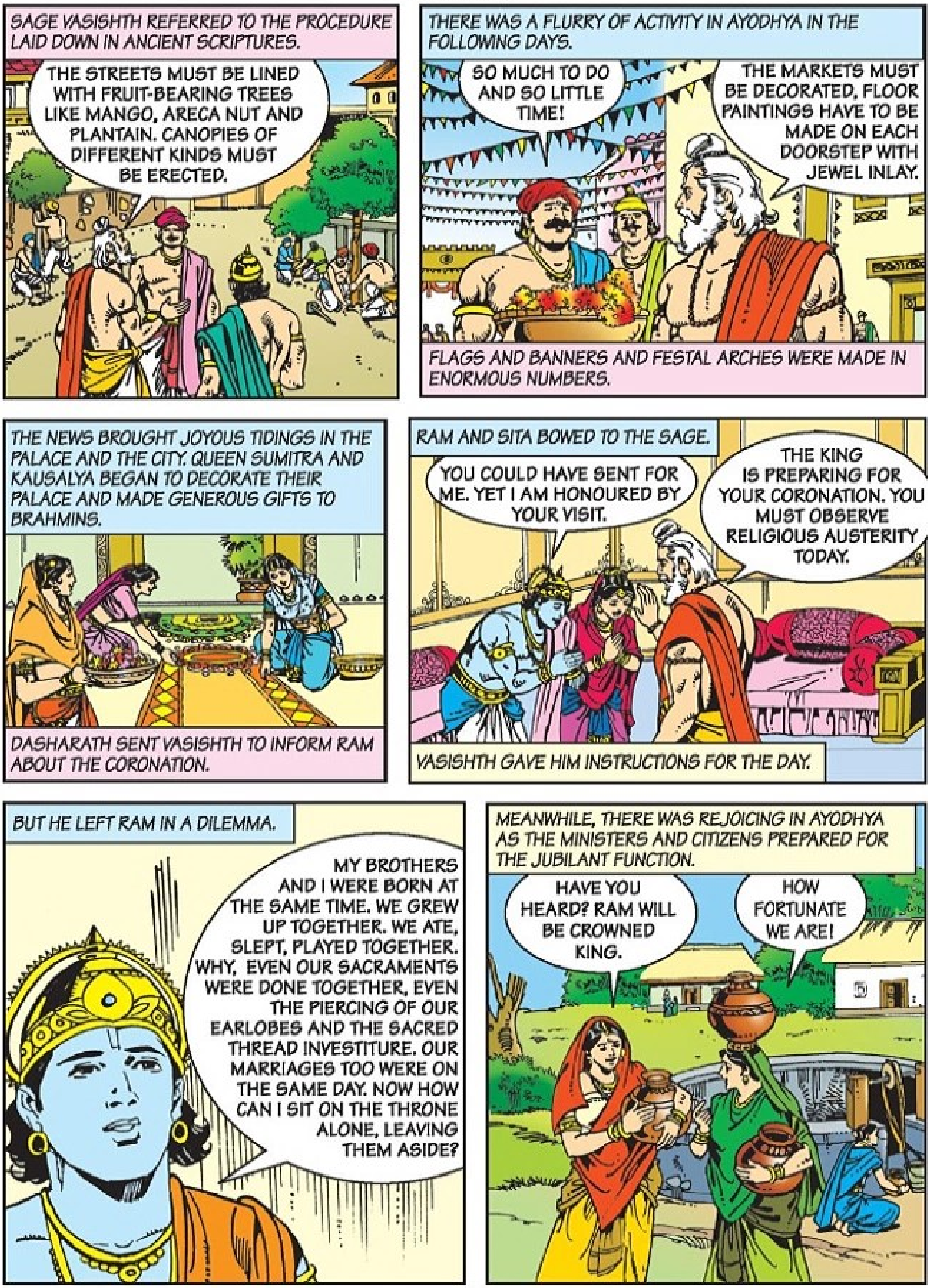

THE WEDDING PROCESSION HAD SWIFT HORSES WITH HANDSOME MOUNTS, GORGEOUS CHARIOTS, MAGNIFICENT ELEPHANTS AND PALANQUINS THAT WERE FOLLOWED BY AN ENDLESS ARRAY OF PORTERS LADEN WITH LUGGAGE.
DASHARATH BLEW ON A CONCH TO SIGNAL THE START OF THE PROCESSION.
THE PROCESSION PROCEEDED WITH SONG AND DANCE WHILE JESTERS ENTERTAINED THE PARTY. ON THE WAY, JANAK HAD ARRANGED FOR BRIDGES TO BE BUILT OVER RIVERS AND REST HOUSES WERE EQUIPPED WITH FOOD AND COUCHES FOR THEIR COMFORT.
AFTER A LONG JOURNEY, THE WEDDING PARTY REACHED JANAKPURI. THEY WERE WELCOMED WITH COLD DRINKS IN GOLD JARS AND DELICIOUS SWEETMEATS. AN ENDLESS LINE OF PORTERS BROUGHT HUGE TRAYS LADEN WITH PARCHED RICE, CURDS AND AUSPICIOUS AROMATIC SUBSTANCES.
WOMEN SANG JOYOUS SONGS AND SHOWERED THEM WITH FRAGRANT FLOWERS WHILE MUSICIANS SOUNDED THEIR DRUMS WITH RAPTURE.
THEY WERE LED TO THEIR COMFORTABLE QUARTERS. RAM AND LAKSHMAN RUSHED TO MEET THEM.
WHEN SHATRUGHN AND BHARAT BOWED BEFORE RAM, HE AFFECTIONATELY LIFTED THEM OFF THEIR FEET.
THE DAY FIXED FOR THE WEDDING WAS IN THE MONTH OF MARGASHEERSH. AFTER OBSERVING THE POSITION OF THE PLANETS AND PROPITIOUS CONJUNCTION OF THE STARS, THE HOUR OF THE WEDDING WAS FIXED. RAM LOOKED RESPLENDENT IN BRIGHT WEDDING GARMENTS AND ORNAMENTS ON HIS DARK, SWARTHY FORM.
THE OTHER THREE PRINCES TOO LOOKED CHARMING, RIDING ON THEIR FESTIVE STEEDS.
SITA'S MOTHER, SUNAYANA, AND OTHER MARRIED WOMEN WELCOMED THE GROOM WITH FESTAL LAMPS AND JARS FULL OF WATER.
MUSIC WAS PLAYED ON FIVE INSTRUMENTS (TANTRI, TAAL, JHANJH, NAGARA, TURAHI) AND FIVE AUSPICIOUS SOUNDS WERE HEARD – THE CHANTING OF THE VEDAS, THE SONGS OF THE BARDS, SHOUTS OF TRIUMPH, THE BLOWING OF CONCHES AND THE BEAT OF DRUMS.

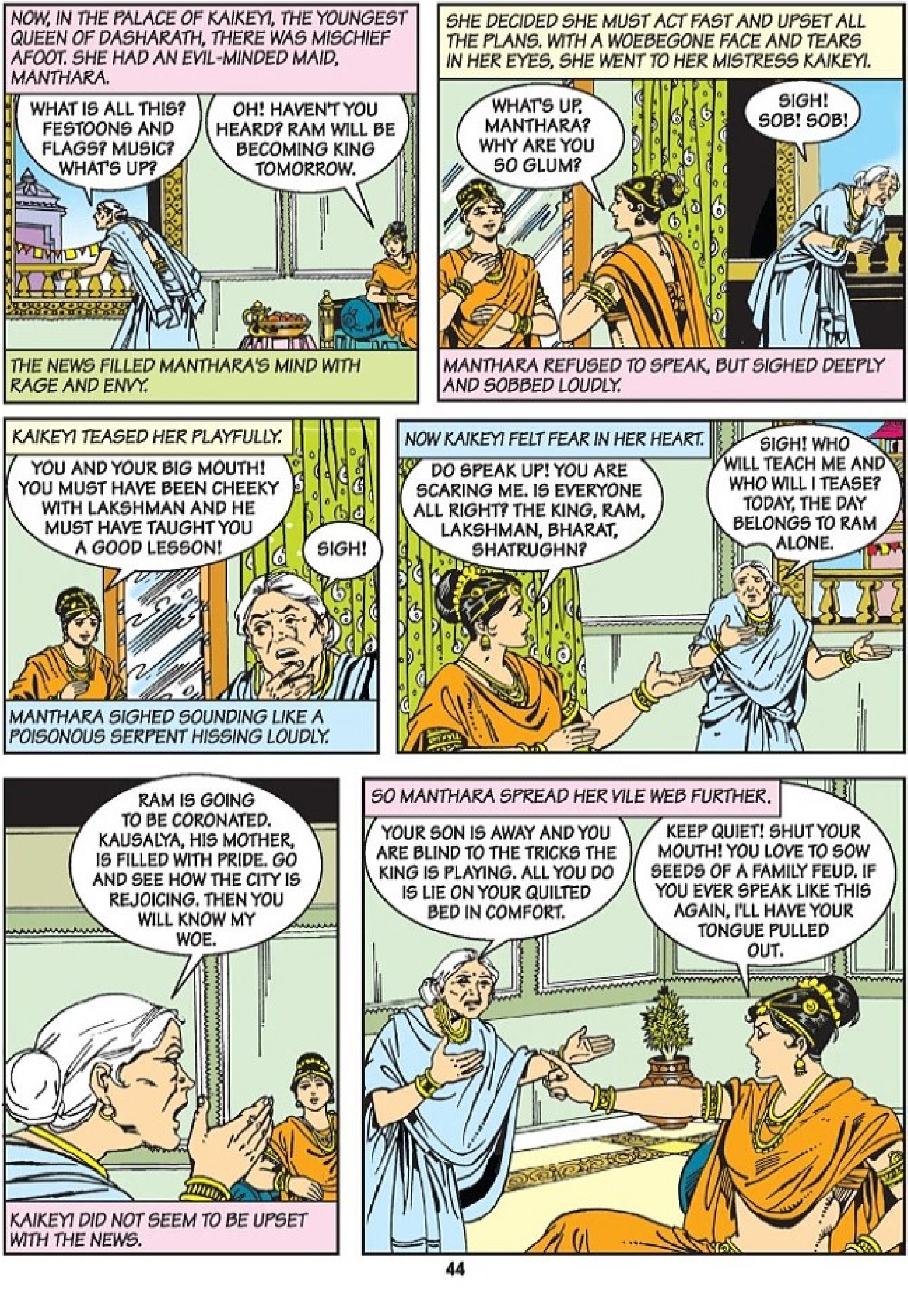

RAM WAS LED TO THE THRONE MADE FOR HIM.
DASHARATH AND JANAK EMBRACED EACH OTHER. THE PRIESTS CHANTED THE PRAYERS FOR THE OCCASION.
THE LADIES OF THE HOUSEHOLD FORMED A CIRCLE AROUND SITA AND LED HER TO THE PAVILION. THEY SANG MELODIOUS SONGS AND THE TINY BELLS AROUND THEIR ANKLES AND WAISTS TINKLED IN TUNE.
THE FAMILY PRIESTS, VASISHTH AND SHATANAND, PERFORMED ALL THE RELIGIOUS RITES AND CEREMONIES ACCORDING TO THEIR FAMILY CUSTOMS.
JANAK AND SUNAYANA CEREMONIOUSLY WASHED RAM'S FEET WITH SCENTED WATER.
THE TWO PRIESTS JOINED THE HANDS OF THE GROOM AND BRIDE AND RECITED THE GENEALOGY OF THE TWO FAMILIES.
JANAK GAVE AWAY THE BRIDE TO RAM, AND THEN THE ENDS OF THEIR GARMENTS WERE TIED INTO A KNOT. WITH THE FIRE GOD AS THE WITNESS, THEY CIRCLED AROUND THE FIRE.
RAM THEN APPLIED VERMILLION POWDER ON SITA'S HEAD.
RAM AND SITA WERE MADE TO SIT TOGETHER ON THE SAME SEAT.
THERE WAS REJOICING ALL OVER THE UNIVERSE, AND THE CRY WENT UP TO THE HEAVENS: RAM AND SITA ARE WEDDED NOW.


KING JANAK CALLED FOR THE OTHER PRINCESSES. URMILA, WHO WAS SITA'S YOUNGER SISTER, WAS MARRIED TO LAKSHMAN.
SHRUTAKIRTI, WHO WAS THE DAUGHTER OF JANAK'S BROTHER, KUSHAKETU, WAS MARRIED TO SHATRUGHN.
HER FAIR SISTER MANDAVI WAS MARRIED TO BHARAT.
THE FOUR PRINCES WERE MARRIED ACCORDING TO THE PRESCRIBED CEREMONY. THE GIFTS GIVEN BY JANAK FILLED THE PAVILION – GOLD AND JEWELS, GARMENTS AND BLANKETS, COWS AND HORSES.
LONG LIVE THE FOUR LOVELY COUPLES!
JAY! JAY!
DASHARATH GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTED THE GIFTS AND WITH EQUAL GENEROSITY, GAVE THEM AWAY TO WHOEVER LIKED THEM.
THERE WAS A SUMPTUOUS WEDDING FEAST WITH A DELICIOUS ARRAY OF DISHES.
WHILE THE GUESTS ATE, SCANDALOUS SONGS WERE SUNG TO ENTERTAIN THEM, AS WAS THE TRADITION.
THE WEDDING PARTY WAS COAXED TO STAY ON FOR SEVERAL DAYS AFTER THE WEDDING CEREMONY.
MAY YOU EVER BE HAPPY!
LIVE A LONG AND HAPPY WEDDED LIFE.
AFTER SEVERAL DAYS AND MANY HALTS ON THE WAY, THE WEDDING PROCESSION REACHED AYODHYA.
THE QUEEN MOTHERS PREPARED FOR THE WELCOME IN THE TRADITIONAL MANNER.
ARE THE TRAYS READY, SUMITRA? KAIKEYI?
LET ME CHECK – TURMERIC, DURVA GRASS, CURDS, BETEL LEAVES, ARECA NUTS, FLOWERS AND LEAVES.
UNBROKEN RICE, SPROUTS OF BARLEY, PARCHED GRAIN, TULSI BLOSSOMS AND PERFUMES OF ROSE, KEVADA, SANDALWOOD AND CAMPHOR.


THE NEWLY MARRIED COUPLES WERE WELCOMED AND MADE MUCH OF BY ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE PALACE.
KING JANAK WAS SO AMIABLE! HE TREATED US WITH SUCH HONOUR!
OH! IT MUST HAVE BEEN WONDERFUL!
KING DASHARATH DESCRIBED THE WEDDING RITUALS IN DETAIL TO THE ENRAPTURED QUEENS.
LATER, DASHARATH SPOKE TO HIS THREE QUEENS.
THE BRIDES ARE STILL YOUNG. THEY ARE LIKE CHILDREN IN A STRANGE HOUSE. TAKE CARE OF THEM AND PROTECT THEM LIKE THE EYELIDS PROTECT OUR EYES.
THE DAYS PASSED IN HAPPINESS. SUCCESS AND PROSPERITY FLOWED INTO AYODHYA LIKE BOUNTEOUS RIVERS.
ALL THE GUESTS AND SAGES HAD RETURNED TO THEIR HOMES. THERE WAS CONTENTMENT IN ALL HEARTS.
ONE DAY, WHILE KING DASHARATH WAS IN HIS COURT –
YOUR HIGHNESS, YOUR CROWN IS ASKEW.
GIVE ME A MIRROR! I WILL ADJUST IT.
HE CASUALLY GLANCED AT THE MIRROR TO ADJUST HIS CROWN.
SUDDENLY –
HUH? I AM TURNING GREY AROUND THE TEMPLES! SURELY THIS IS A SIGN! AGE IS BECKONING ME. THESE WHITE HAIRS ARE WHISPERING IN MY EAR, MAKE RAM THE KING.
THE THOUGHT FILLED HIS HEART WITH JOY. HE DECIDED TO VISIT HIS GURU, VASISHTH, AT ONCE.
GREETINGS! O WISE SAGE! RAM IS NOW PERFECT IN ALL ACCOMPLISHMENTS. EVERYONE LOVES HIM AS MUCH AS I DO.

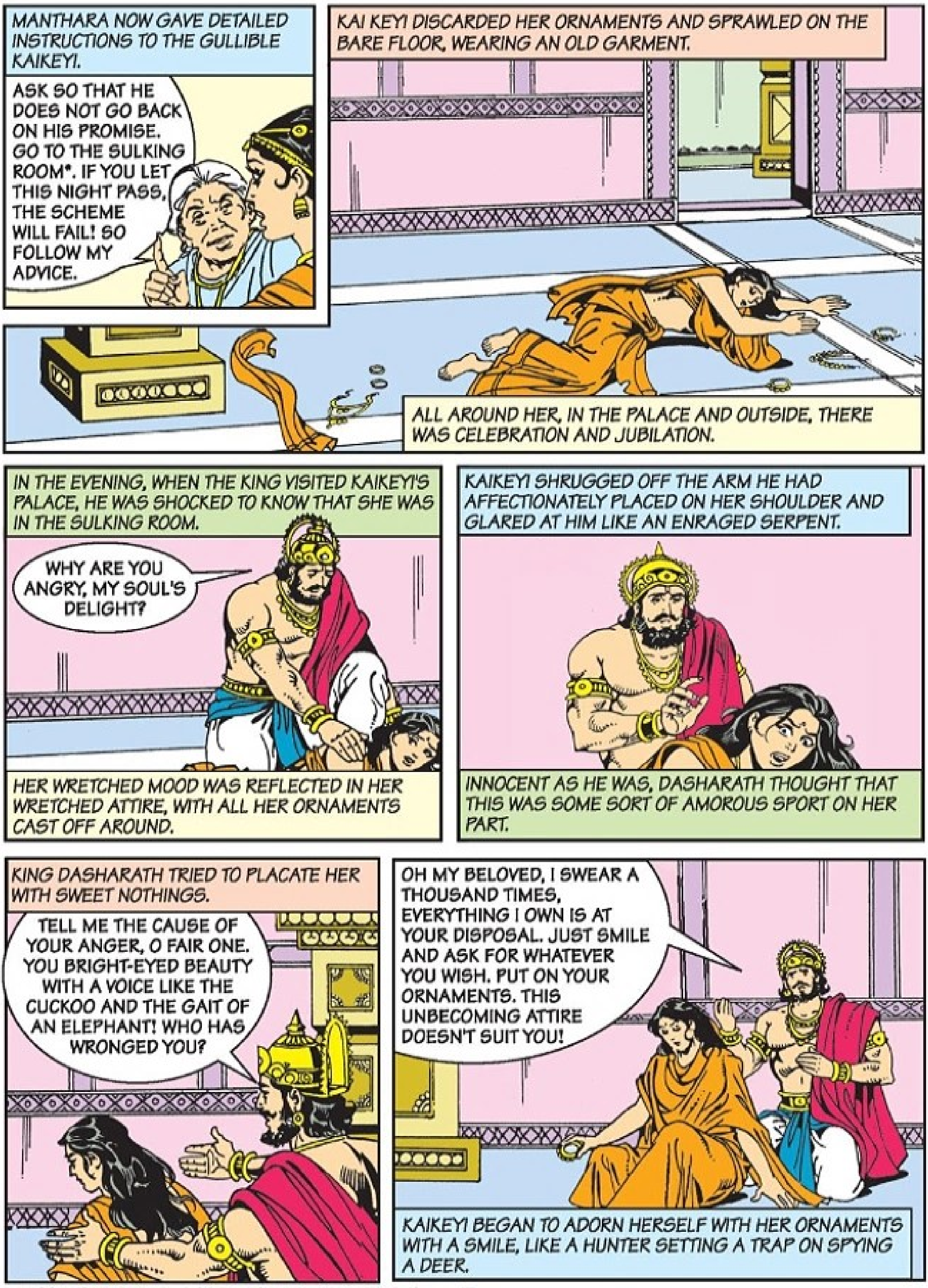

I HAVE JUST ONE WISH, O SAGE, ONE LONGING THAT CAN BE FULFILLED,WITH YOUR GRACE.
TELL ME, O KING, WHAT IS YOUR WISH. YOUR WISH WILL SURELY BE FULFILLED.
DASHARATH WAS THRILLED TO SEE HIS GURU IN SUCH AN AMIABLE MOOD.
RAM SHOULD BE GIVEN REGAL POWERS AND MADE YUVRAJ, THE HEIR APPARENT. I WANT THIS TO HAPPEN IN MY LIFETIME. THEN I WILL HAVE NO WISHES OR REGRETS.
SO BE IT! MAKE THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CORONATION AT ONCE!
QUICK, O KING. DON'T DELAY AT ALL!
KING DASHARATH RETURNED TO HIS PALACE AND SUMMONED ALL HIS COUNSELLORS.
HE TOLD THEM OF HIS PLAN TO INSTALL RAM ON THE THRONE.
MAY YOU LIVE LONG,O KING! YOU HAVE THOUGHT OF AN EXCELLENT PLAN.
IT WILL MAKE EVERYONE HAPPY. LET'S LOSE NO TIME.
THE KING FELT RELIEVED AT THEIR REACTION. IT WAS AS IF A GROWING CREEPER HAD FOUND THE SUPPORT OF A STRONG BOUGH.
SAGE VASISHTH WAS INVITED TO DIRECT THE PREPARATIONS.
FETCH WATER FROM ALL THE SACRED PLACES.
SEND MESSENGERS TO ALL THE MAIN PILGRIMAGE SPOTS AND HOLY RIVERS.
SUMANTR AND THE OTHER MINISTERS MADE DETAILED NOTES OF HIS INSTRUCTIONS.
HERBS, ROOTS, FLOWERS, FRUITS AND LEAVES.
DEER SKIN, WOOLLEN AND SILK CLOTH.
I'LL MAKE A LIST OF THE AUSPICIOUS ARTICLES REQUIRED FOR THE CORONATION.


SAGE VASISHTH REFERRED TO THE PROCEDURE LAID DOWN IN ANCIENT SCRIPTURES.
THE STREETS MUST BE LINED WITH FRUIT-BEARING TREES LIKE MANGO, ARECA NUT AND PLANTAIN. CANOPIES OF DIFFERENT KINDS MUST BE ERECTED.
THERE WAS A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY IN AYODHYA IN THE FOLLOWING DAYS.
SO MUCH TO DO AND SO LITTLE TIME!
THE MARKETS MUST BE DECORATED, FLOOR PAINTINGS HAVE TO BE MADE ON EACH DOORSTEP WITH JEWEL INLAY.
FLAGS AND BANNERS AND FESTAL ARCHES WERE MADE IN ENORMOUS NUMBERS.
THE NEWS BROUGHT JOYOUS TIDINGS IN THE PALACE AND THE CITY. QUEEN SUMITRA AND KAUSALYA BEGAN TO DECORATE THEIR PALACE AND MADE GENEROUS GIFTS TO BRAHMINS.
DASHARATH SENT VASISHTH TO INFORM RAM ABOUT THE CORONATION.
RAM AND SITA BOWED TO THE SAGE.
YOU COULD HAVE SENT FOR ME. YET I AM HONOURED BY YOUR VISIT.
THE KING IS PREPARING FOR YOUR CORONATION. YOU MUST OBSERVE RELIGIOUS AUSTERITY TODAY.
VASISHTH GAVE HIM INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DAY.
BUT HE LEFT RAM IN A DILEMMA.
MY BROTHERS AND I WERE BORN AT THE SAME TIME. WE GREW UP TOGETHER. WE ATE, SLEPT, PLAYED TOGETHER. WHY, EVEN OUR SACRAMENTS WERE DONE TOGETHER, EVEN THE PIERCING OF OUR EARLOBES AND THE SACRED THREAD INVESTITURE. OUR MARRIAGES TOO WERE ON THE SAME DAY. NOW HOW CAN I SIT ON THE THRONE ALONE, LEAVING THEM ASIDE?
MEANWHILE, THERE WAS REJOICING IN AYODHYA AS THE MINISTERS AND CITIZENS PREPARED FOR THE JUBILANT FUNCTION.
HAVE YOU HEARD? RAM WILL BE CROWNED KING.
HOW FORTUNATE WE ARE!


NOW, IN THE PALACE OF KAIKEYI, THE YOUNGEST QUEEN OF DASHARATH, THERE WAS MISCHIEF AFOOT. SHE HAD AN EVIL-MINDED MAID, MANTHARA.
WHAT IS ALL THIS? FESTOONS AND FLAGS? MUSIC? WHAT'S UP?
OH! HAVEN'T YOU HEARD? RAM WILL BE BECOMING KING TOMORROW.
THE NEWS FILLED MANTHARA'S MIND WITH RAGE AND ENVY.
SHE DECIDED SHE MUST ACT FAST AND UPSET ALL THE PLANS. WITH A WOEBEGONE FACE AND TEARS IN HER EYES, SHE WENT TO HER MISTRESS KAIKEYI.
WHAT'S UP, MANTHARA? WHY ARE YOU SO GLUM?
SIGH! SOB! SOB!
MANTHARA REFUSED TO SPEAK, BUT SIGHED DEEPLY AND SOBBED LOUDLY.
KAIKEYI TEASED HER PLAYFULLY.
YOU AND YOUR BIG MOUTH! YOU MUST HAVE BEEN CHEEKY WITH LAKSHMAN AND HE MUST HAVE TAUGHT YOU A GOOD LESSON!
SIGH!
MANTHARA SIGHED SOUNDING LIKE A POISONOUS SERPENT HISSING LOUDLY.
NOW KAIKEYI FELT FEAR IN HER HEART.
DO SPEAK UP! YOU ARE SCARING ME. IS EVERYONE ALL RIGHT? THE KING, RAM, LAKSHMAN, BHARAT, SHATRUGHN?
SIGH! WHO WILL TEACH ME AND WHO WILL I TEASE? TODAY, THE DAY BELONGS TO RAM ALONE.
RAM IS GOING TO BE CORONATED. KAUSALYA, HIS MOTHER, IS FILLED WITH PRIDE. GO AND SEE HOW THE CITY IS REJOICING. THEN YOU WILL KNOW MY WOE.
KAIKEYI DID NOT SEEM TO BE UPSET WITH THE NEWS.
SO MANTHARA SPREAD HER VILE WEB FURTHER.
YOUR SON IS AWAY AND YOU ARE BLIND TO THE TRICKS THE KING IS PLAYING. ALL YOU DO IS LIE ON YOUR QUILTED BED IN COMFORT.
KEEP QUIET! SHUT YOUR MOUTH! YOU LOVE TO SOW SEEDS OF A FAMILY FEUD. IF YOU EVER SPEAK LIKE THIS AGAIN, I'LL HAVE YOUR TONGUE PULLED OUT.


BUT MANTHARA WAS AN OLD, TRUSTED RETAINER. SO KAIKEYI CUSHIONED HER HARSH WORDS WITH SWEET TALK.
OH MANTHARA! I CAN'T STAY ANGRY WITH YOU, EVEN IN MY DREAMS! BLESSED BE THE DAY WHEN YOUR NEWS TURNS OUT TO BE TRUE.
KAIKEYI LOVED RAM DEARLY AND HE TOO WAS AFFECTIONATE TO HER.
KAIKEYI WAS LOST IN RAPTURE AT THE IDEA.
HMM! RAM WILL BE KING OF AYODHYA! WHAT A CUSTOM THE RACE OF RAGHU'S FOLLOWS. THE ELDEST SON BECOMES KING AND THE OTHERS SERVE HIM. TELL ME, HOW CAN I REWARD YOU FOR BRINGING ME THIS HAPPY NEWS!
GRR
RAM IS DEARER TO ME THAN LIFE! WHY SHOULD I MOAN HIS ASCENT TO THE THRONE? WHY ARE YOU GRIEVING AND MOANING SO?
I HAVE SAID WHATEVER I WANTED TO SAY. MY TRUE WORDS HAVE WOUNDED YOU. ALAS! IT'S PEOPLE WHO ARE FALSE THAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITES!
I WILL ALSO DO SO OR KEEP MUM ALL DAY! GOD HAS GIVEN ME THIS MISSHAPEN BODY AND MADE ME DEPENDENT ON OTHERS.
WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE TO ME WHOEVER IS TO BE KING. I'LL REMAIN A MAID, WON'T I, AND NOT BECOME A QUEEN.
MANTHARA PUT ON HER MOST CONCERNED EXPRESSION.
I CAN'T BEAR TO SEE YOU HARMED. THAT'S MY STUPID NATURE. FORGIVE ME! IT WAS A MISTAKE TO SPEAK SO!
TELL ME, WHAT WORRIED YOU?
MANTHARA'S WICKED PLAN WORKED AND KAIKEYI WAS MESMERISED INTO BELIEVING HER CUNNING WORDS.
LIKE THE MALIGNANT SATURN THAT CASTS ITS INFLUENCE FOR LONG, MANTHARA BEGAN TO CAST HER EVIL SHADOW ON THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD.
IT'S TRUE THAT YOU LOVE RAM AND RAM LOVES YOU TOO. BUT TIMES HAVE CHANGED AND EVEN FRIENDS CAN BECOME FOES. YOUR RIVAL QUEEN KAUSALYA WANTS TO UPROOT YOU.
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING!

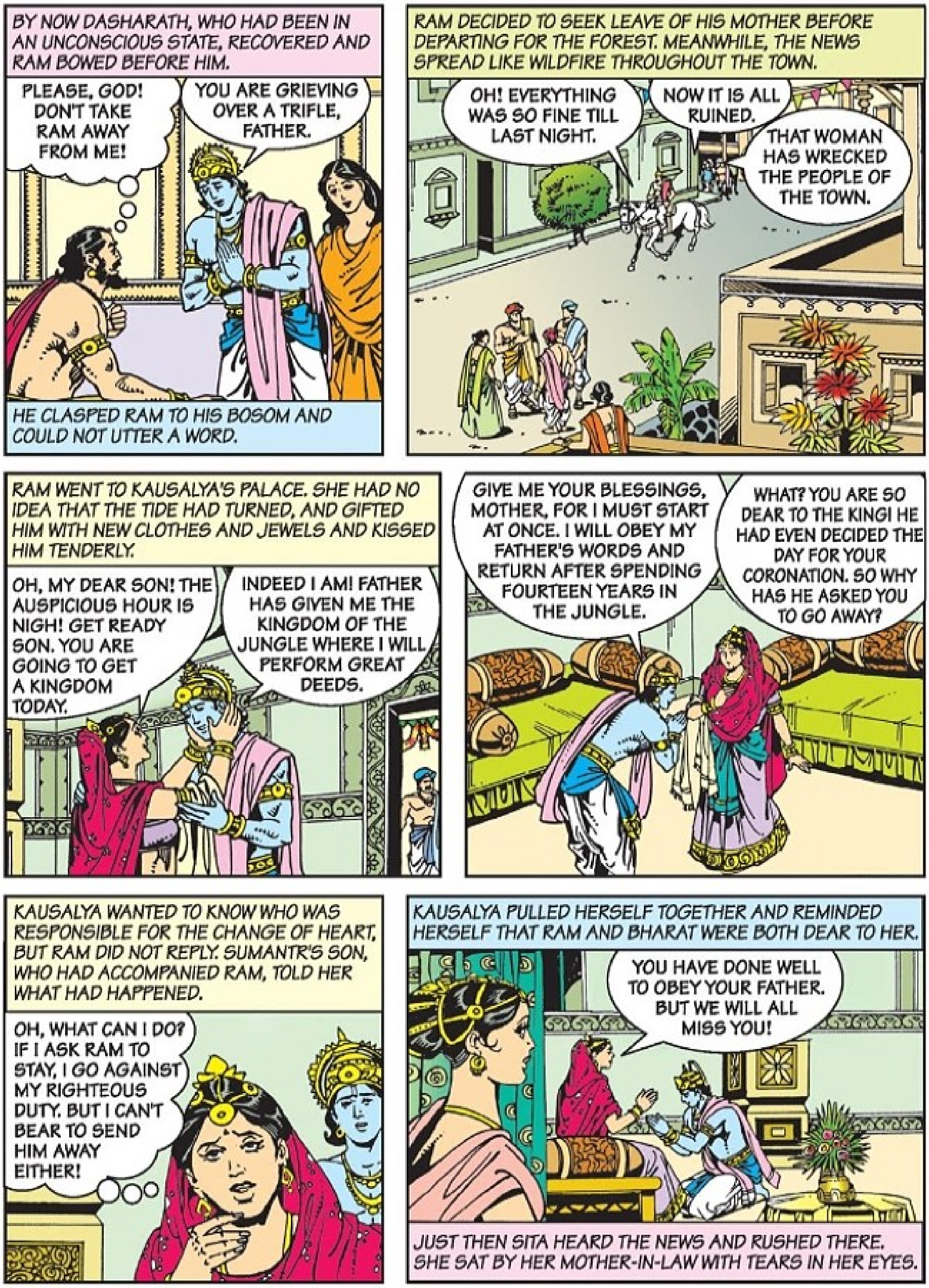

THE KING SPEAKS SWEETLY, BUT HAS A MALICIOUS MIND. YOU ARE GUILELESS AND SIMPLE. KAUSALYA, YOUR CO-WIFE, HAS CUNNINGLY SENT YOUR SON BHARAT TO HIS UNCLE'S HOUSE.
MANTHARA THEN CONCOCTED REASONS FOR THE FORTHCOMING CORONATION.
RAM'S MOTHER IS JEALOUS OF YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE THE FAVOURITE OF THE KING. SHE HAS PERSUADED THE KING TO ARRANGE THE CROWNING RIGHT AWAY. YOU MAY SAY THAT RAM'S BECOMING THE KING IS THE FAMILY NORM. I AGREE! BUT IT IS THE CONSEQUENCE THAT WORRIES ME SO!
MANTHARA THEN RECALLED SEVERAL TALES WHERE RIVAL WIVES HAD USED EVIL METHODS TO GET RID OF COMPETITION. SHE MADE SURE THAT THE SEEDS OF RESENTMENT WERE FIRMLY PLANTED IN KAIKEYI'S HEART.
FOR A FULL FORTNIGHT, PREPARATIONS HAVE BEEN AFOOT FOR THE CORONATION AND YOU HAD NOT EVEN HEARD ABOUT IT TILL I TOLD YOU.
AS SOON AS RAM IS CROWNED KING, YOU WILL BE LIKE A FLY IN A SAUCER OF MILK TO BE THROWN OUT! YOU AND YOUR SON WILL BE TREATED LIKE SERVANTS. BHARAT MAY EVEN BE PUT INTO PRISON WHILE LAKSHMAN WILL BE RAM'S LIEUTENANT.
OH NO! YOU ARE RIGHT, MANTHARA. I CANNOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN A FRIEND AND A FOE.
KAIKEYI BROKE OUT INTO A SWEAT AND TREMBLED LIKE A PLANTAIN LEAF.
KAIKEYI BEGAN TO SPEAK OF GOING AWAY TO HER FATHER'S HOUSE. BUT MANTHARA HAD OTHER PLANS FOR HER.
DON'T FEEL SO WRETCHED! I CAN TELL YOU HOW TO CHANGE YOUR LUCK.
HAVING WON OVER KAIKEYI'S TRUST, MANTHARA NOW WENT FOR THE KILL. SHE WHETTED THE KNIFE OF DECEIT ON THE WHETSTONE OF HER HEART.
DON'T YOU REMEMBER THE INCIDENT YOU ONCE TOLD ME. THE KING ONCE PROMISED YOU TWO BOONS. ASK FOR THE THRONE FOR YOUR SON AND EXILE FOR RAM.
UHHHUH.

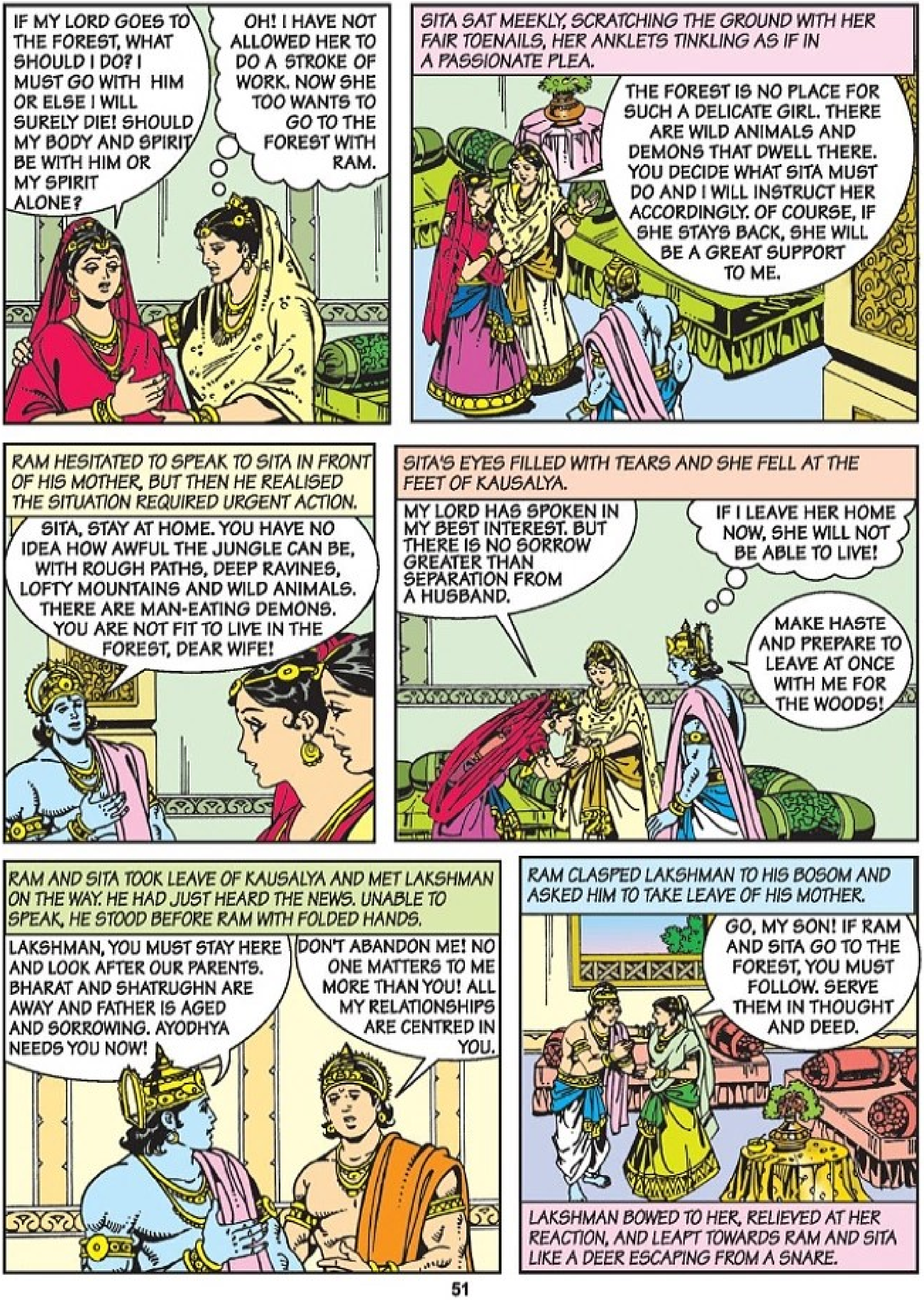


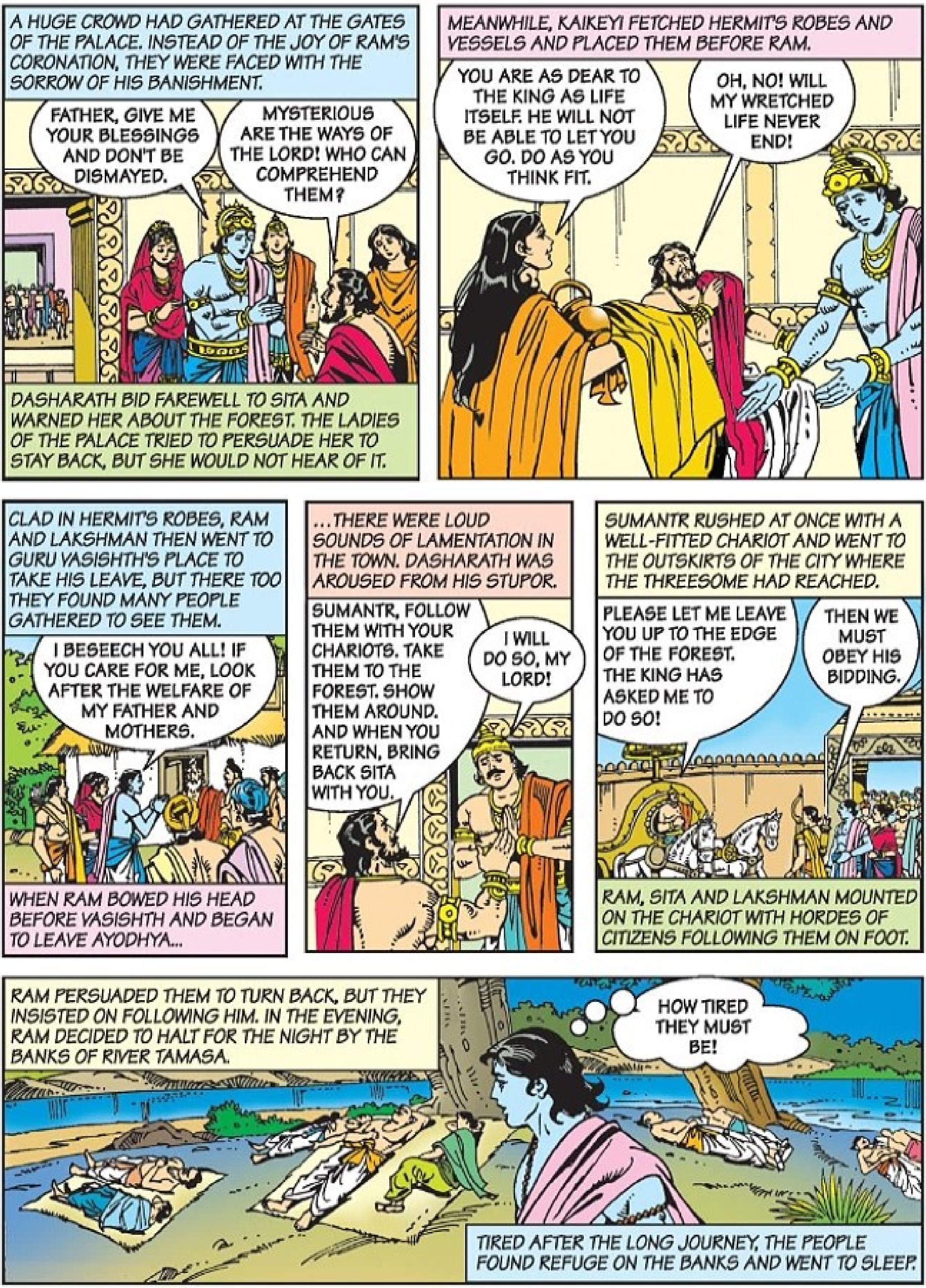
* A ROOM TO WHICH LADIES OF THE ROYAL FAMILY RETIRED TO EXPRESS THEIR RESENTMENT

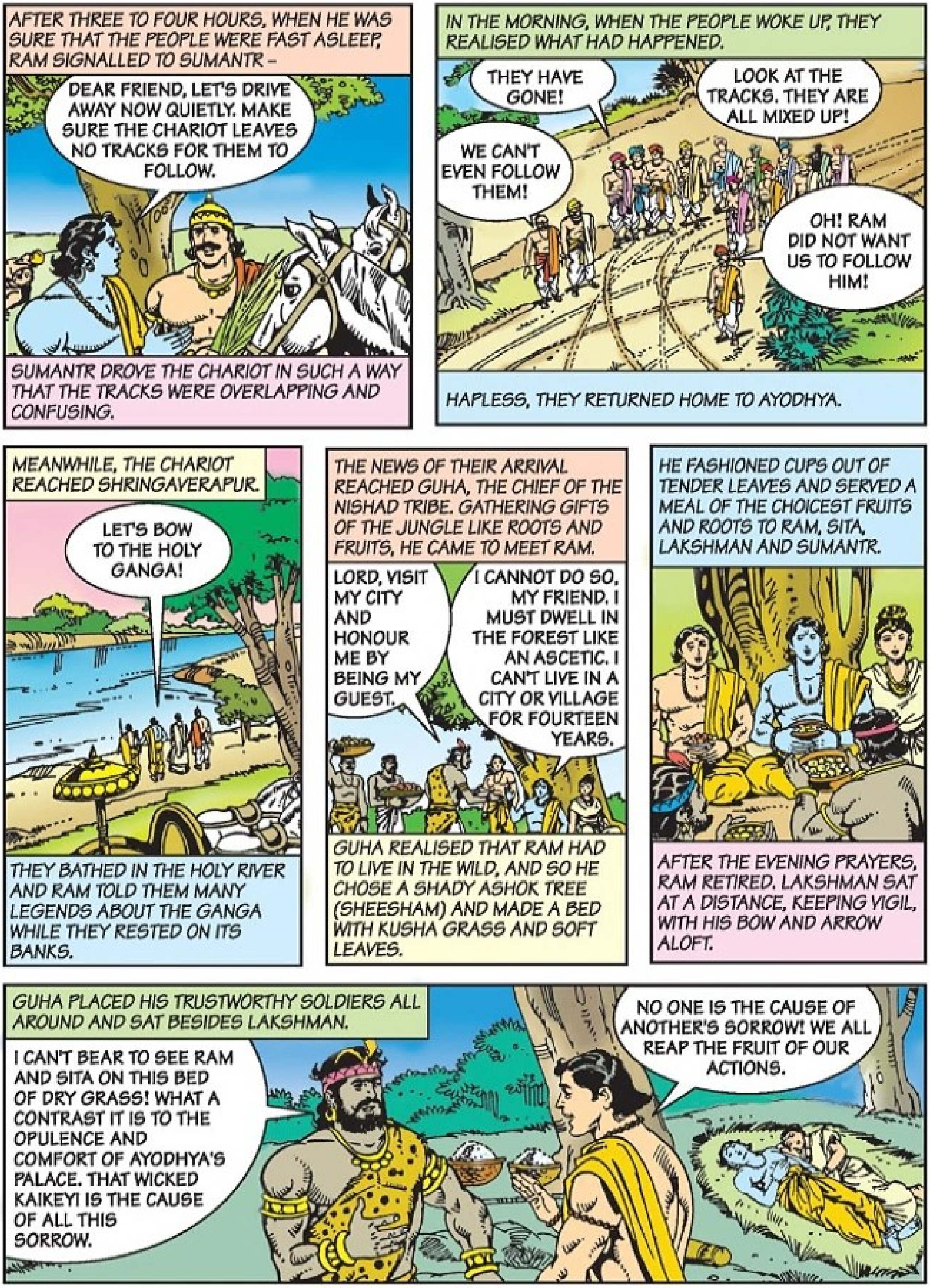

DASHARATH THOUGHT SHE HAD RECONCILED AND GIVEN UP HER ANGER.
OH, DEAR ONE! YOUR DEAREST WISH WILL COME TRUE. RAM WILL BE CROWNED KING TOMORROW. THERE IS JOY ALL AROUND. YOU TOO SHOULD PUT ON YOUR FESTIVE CLOTHES!
OH NO!
SHE CONCEALED HER ANGER BENEATH A FALSE SMILE TO GET WHAT SHE WANTED.
DEAR ONE, YOU SAY ASK FOR ANYTHING, BUT DO YOU REALLY MEAN IT? YOU HAVE GIVEN ME TWO BOONS, BUT I DOUBT IF I WILL EVER GET THEM.
OH! I TRULY HAD FORGOTTEN ABOUT THEM. SURELY YOU CAN ASK ME FOR FOUR INSTEAD OF JUST TWO BOONS.
DASHARATH COULD NOT BEAR THE THOUGHT OF BREAKING A PROMISE.
IT IS THE RULE IN THE RACE OF RAGHUS THAT A PROMISE MUST BE KEPT EVEN AT THE COST OF ONE'S LIFE.
WHEN DASHARATH REMINDED HER THAT HE HAD SWORN ON RAM'S NAME TO KEEP HIS WORD, SHE FELT CONVINCED.
DEAREST ONE, I HAVE TWO WISHES. ONE IS THE CORONATION OF MY SON BHARAT AS THE KING.
MY SECOND WISH IS THAT RAM SHOULD LIVE LIKE AN ASCETIC IN THE FOREST FOR FOURTEEN YEARS.
DASHARATH TURNED PALE AND WAS PARALYSED WITH HORROR. WITH HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS, HE CLOSED BOTH HIS EYES.
OH! MY HEART'S DESIRE HAD JUST BLOSSOMED AND WAS ABOUT TO BEAR FRUIT. BUT THIS, KAIKEYI HAS UPROOTED AND DESTROYED IT, LIKE AN ELEPHANT ON RAMPAGE!
ISN'T BHARAT YOUR SON TOO?
RAM AND BHARAT ARE EQUALLY DEAR TO ME. I WILL SEND FOR BHARAT AT ONCE AND BESTOW THE KINGDOM ON HIM. BUT YOUR SECOND WISH IS PAINFUL. HOW CAN I LIVE WITHOUT RAM? ASK FOR SOME OTHER BOON!
GRANT MY WISHES OR BE DISGRACED AS A PROMISE-BREAKER. IF, BY DAYBREAK, RAM DOESN'T DEPART FOR THE FOREST, IT WILL MEAN MY DEATH AND YOUR DISGRACE.

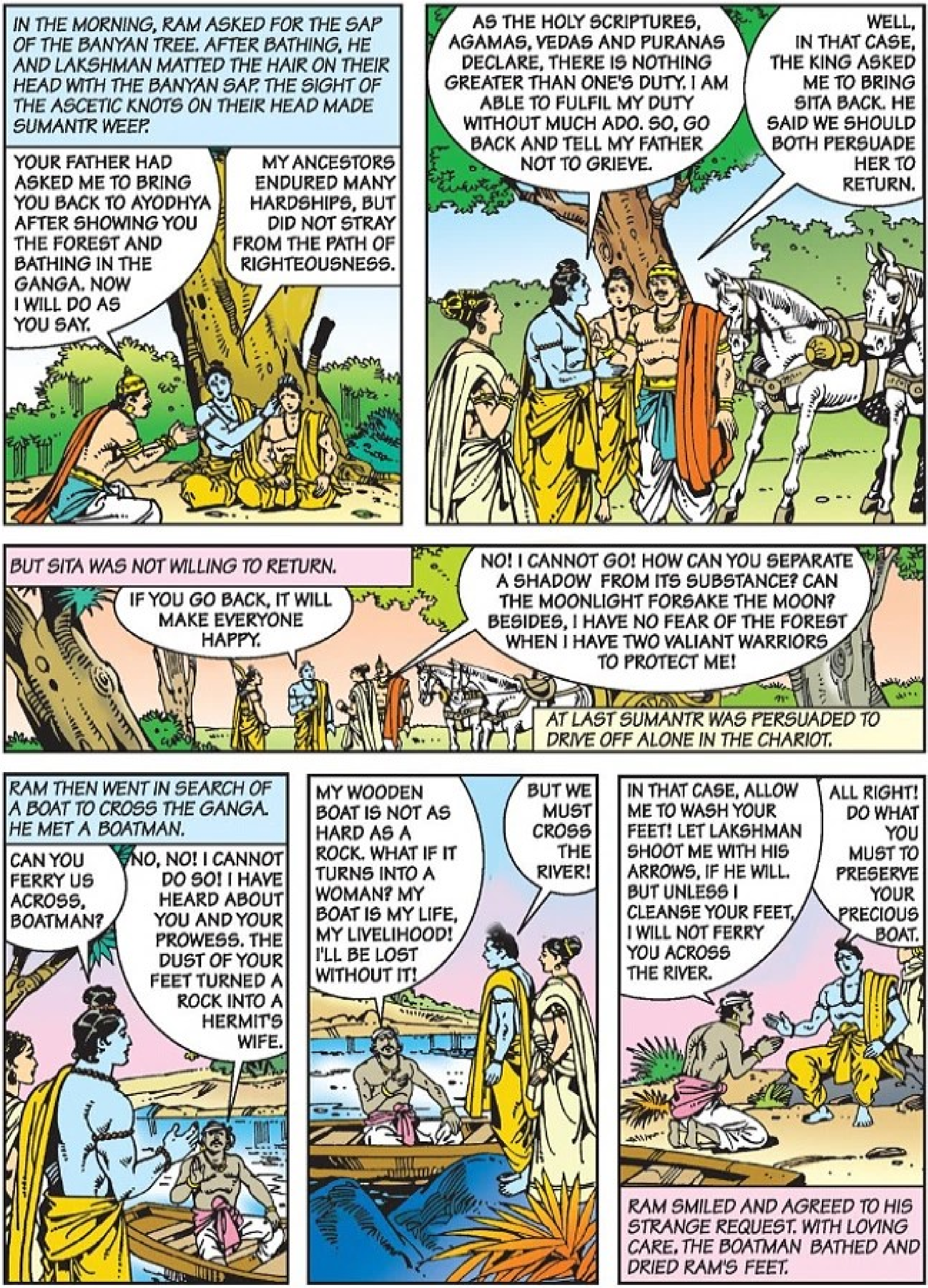

DASHARATH REALISED THAT SHE WAS RESOLUTE IN HER DEMANDS. HE BOWED BEFORE HER AND CLASPED HER FEET IN SUPPLICATION.
DON'T DESTROY OUR SOLAR RACE! KILL ME, BUT DON'T TAKE RAM AWAY FROM ME.
OH RAM! RAM!
DON'T CRY NOW! FOR A MAN TRUE TO HIS WORD, LIFE, WIFE, SON AND WEALTH, ALL ARE LIKE BLADES OF GRASS!
DASHARATH CRIED PITEOUSLY ALL NIGHT LONG, STRICKEN WITH SORROW. AT DAYBREAK, THE AUSPICIOUS SOUNDS OF FLUTE, LUTE AND CONCH RANG OUT AT THE GATE.
WHY HASN'T KING DASHARATH WOKEN UP YET? HE IS USUALLY UP SO EARLY! GO AND CALL HIM, SUMANTR!
I'LL DO SO AT ONCE! WE NEED HIS ORDER TO START ALL THE PREPARATIONS.
SUMANTR WAS SHOCKED TO SEE DASHARATH IN A HAPLESS STATE.
THE KING HAS NOT SLEPT AT ALL. HE KEPT REPEATING RAM'S NAME, BUT WOULDN'T TELL ME THE REASON. GO AT ONCE AND FETCH RAM HERE SO THAT WE WILL KNOW WHAT THE MATTER IS.
SOMETHING IS AMISS HERE.
SUMANTR WENT TO FETCH RAM, AND SOON RETURNED WITH HIM.
TELL ME, MOTHER, WHY MY FATHER IS SO SAD?
WELL, THE REASON IS THAT HE IS VERY FOND OF YOU. HE HAD GIVEN ME TWO BOONS, BUT NOW HE IS GRIEF-STRICKEN ON HEARING MY REQUEST, AND THE REASON IS HIS ATTACHMENT TO YOU.
HE IS PLACED ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA. ON THE ONE HAND IS THE LOVE FOR HIS SON. ON THE OTHER IS HIS PROMISE. OBEY HIS COMMAND AND RELIEVE HIM FROM THIS GREAT TORTURE.
KAIKEYI THEN TOLD RAM OF THE BOONS SHE HAD ASKED FOR.
LISTEN, MY MOTHER! BLESSED IS THE SON WHO OBEYS HIS PARENTS.
HE EVEN SAW THE REDEEMING VIRTUE OF HER VILE PLAN.
THE FOREST WILL BE A GOOD PLACE FOR ME TO STAY! I'LL MEET THE HERMITS THERE. MY DEAR BHARAT WILL GET THE KINGDOM. EVERY THING IS WONDERFUL. ONLY ONE THING SADDENS ME. FATHER IS GRIEVING OVER SUCH A TRIFLE!

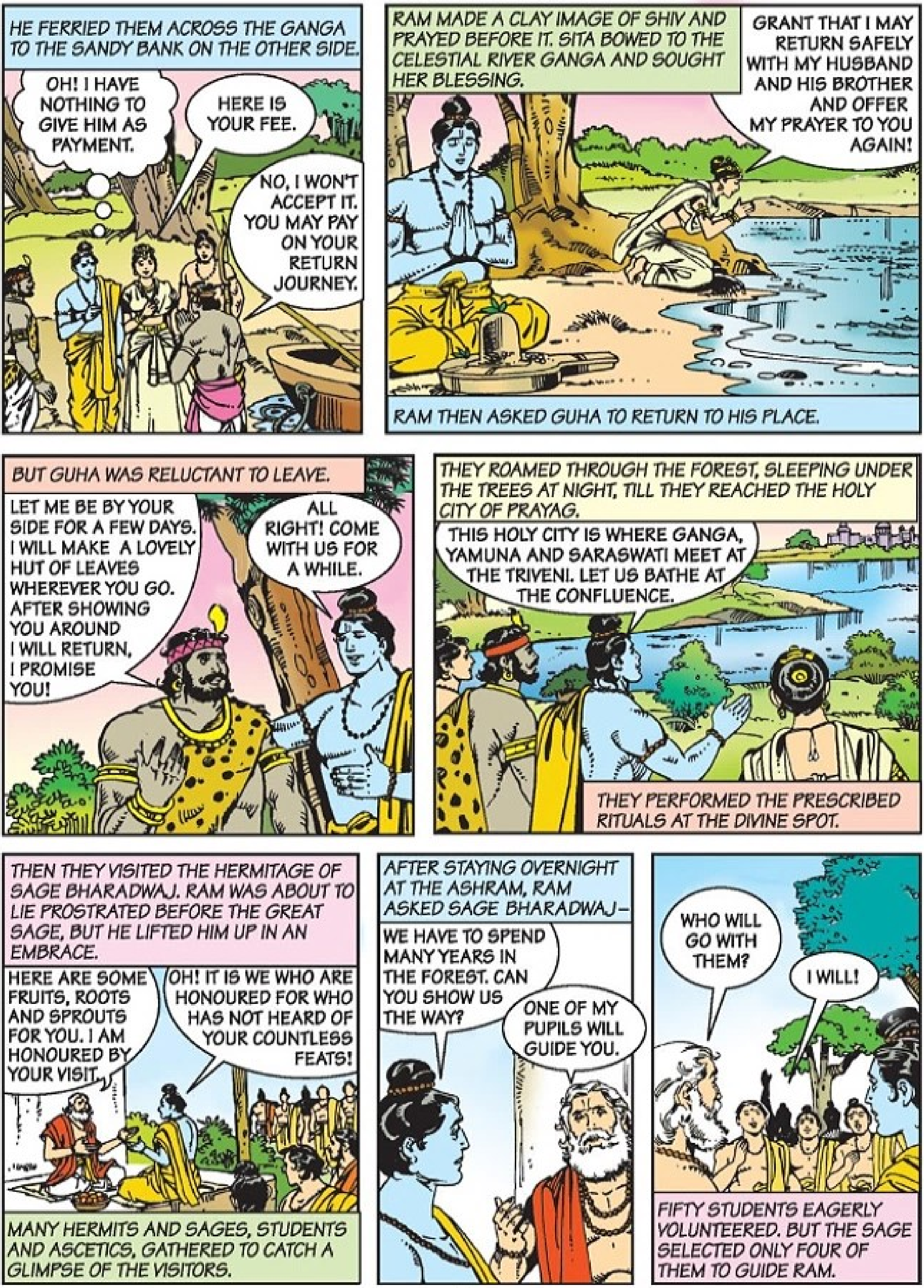

BY NOW DASHARATH, WHO HAD BEEN IN AN UNCONSCIOUS STATE, RECOVERED AND RAM BOWED BEFORE HIM.
PLEASE, GOD! DON'T TAKE RAM AWAY FROM ME!
YOU ARE GRIEVING OVER A TRIFLE, FATHER.
HE CLASPED RAM TO HIS BOSOM AND COULD NOT UTTER A WORD.
RAM DECIDED TO SEEK LEAVE OF HIS MOTHER BEFORE DEPARTING FOR THE FOREST. MEANWHILE, THE NEWS SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE THROUGHOUT THE TOWN.
OH! EVERYTHING WAS SO FINE TILL LAST NIGHT.
NOW IT IS ALL RUINED.
THAT WOMAN HAS WRECKED THE PEOPLE OF THE TOWN.
RAM WENT TO KAUSALYA'S PALACE. SHE HAD NO IDEA THAT THE TIDE HAD TURNED, AND GIFTED HIM WITH NEW CLOTHES AND JEWELS AND KISSED HIM TENDERLY.
OH, MY DEAR SON! THE AUSPICIOUS HOUR IS NIGH! GET READY SON. YOU ARE GOING TO GET A KINGDOM TODAY.
INDEED I AM! FATHER HAS GIVEN ME THE KINGDOM OF THE JUNGLE WHERE I WILL PERFORM GREAT DEEDS.
GIVE ME YOUR BLESSINGS, MOTHER, FOR I MUST START AT ONCE. I WILL OBEY MY FATHER'S WORDS AND RETURN AFTER SPENDING FOURTEEN YEARS IN THE JUNGLE.
WHAT? YOU ARE SO DEAR TO THE KING! HE HAD EVEN DECIDED THE DAY FOR YOUR CORONATION. SO WHY HAS HE ASKED YOU TO GO AWAY?
KAUSALYA WANTED TO KNOW WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CHANGE OF HEART, BUT RAM DID NOT REPLY. SUMANTR'S SON, WHO HAD ACCOMPANIED RAM, TOLD HER WHAT HAD HAPPENED.
OH, WHAT CAN I DO? IF I ASK RAM TO STAY, I GO AGAINST MY RIGHTEOUS DUTY. BUT I CAN'T BEAR TO SEND HIM AWAY EITHER!
KAUSALYA PULLED HERSELF TOGETHER AND REMINDED HERSELF THAT RAM AND BHARAT WERE BOTH DEAR TO HER.
YOU HAVE DONE WELL TO OBEY YOUR FATHER. BUT WE WILL ALL MISS YOU!
JUST THEN SITA HEARD THE NEWS AND RUSHED THERE. SHE SAT BY HER MOTHER-IN-LAW WITH TEARS IN HER EYES.

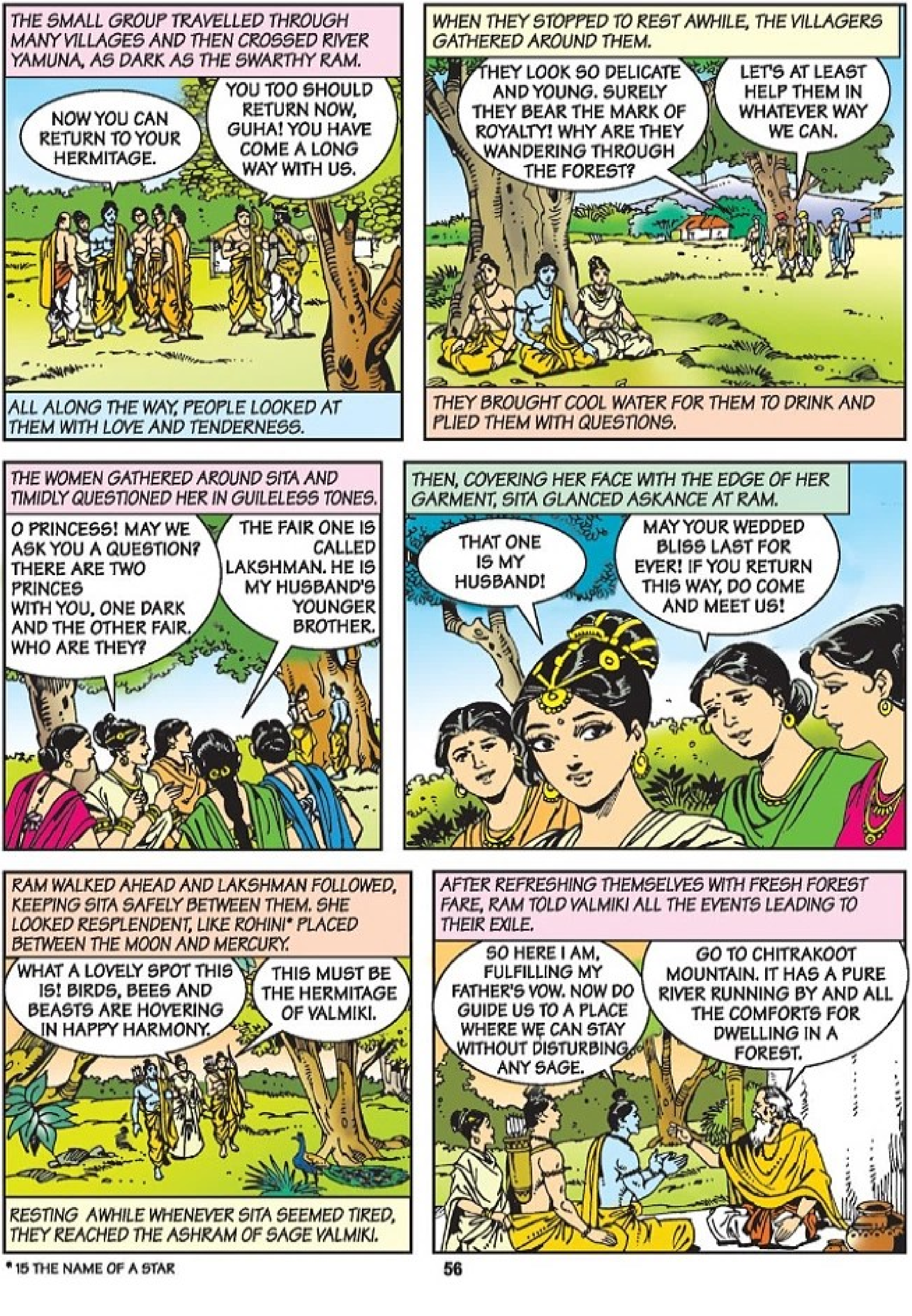

IF MY LORD GOES TO THE FOREST, WHAT SHOULD I DO? I MUST GO WITH HIM OR ELSE I WILL SURELY DIE! SHOULD MY BODY AND SPIRIT BE WITH HIM OR MY SPIRIT ALONE?
OH! I HAVE NOT ALLOWED HER TO DO A STROKE OF WORK. NOW SHE TOO WANTS TO GO TO THE FOREST WITH RAM.
SITA SAT MEEKLY, SCRATCHING THE GROUND WITH HER FAIR TOENAILS, HER ANKLETS TINKLING AS IF IN A PASSIONATE PLEA.
THE FOREST IS NO PLACE FOR SUCH A DELICATE GIRL. THERE ARE WILD ANIMALS AND DEMONS THAT DWELL THERE. YOU DECIDE WHAT SITA MUST DO AND I WILL INSTRUCT HER ACCORDINGLY. OF COURSE, IF SHE STAYS BACK, SHE WILL BE A GREAT SUPPORT TO ME.
RAM HESITATED TO SPEAK TO SITA IN FRONT OF HIS MOTHER, BUT THEN HE REALISED THE SITUATION REQUIRED URGENT ACTION.
SITA, STAY AT HOME. YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW AWFUL THE JUNGLE CAN BE, WITH ROUGH PATHS, DEEP RAVINES, LOFTY MOUNTAINS AND WILD ANIMALS. THERE ARE MAN-EATING DEMONS. YOU ARE NOT FIT TO LIVE IN THE FOREST, DEAR WIFE!
SITA'S EYES FILLED WITH TEARS AND SHE FELL AT THE FEET OF KAUSALYA.
MY LORD HAS SPOKEN IN MY BEST INTEREST. BUT THERE IS NO SORROW GREATER THAN SEPARATION FROM A HUSBAND.
IF I LEAVE HER HOME NOW, SHE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO LIVE!
MAKE HASTE AND PREPARE TO LEAVE AT ONCE WITH ME FOR THE WOODS!
RAM AND SITA TOOK LEAVE OF KAUSALYA AND MET LAKSHMAN ON THE WAY. HE HAD JUST HEARD THE NEWS. UNABLE TO SPEAK, HE STOOD BEFORE RAM WITH FOLDED HANDS.
LAKSHMAN, YOU MUST STAY HERE AND LOOK AFTER OUR PARENTS. BHARAT AND SHATRUGHN ARE AWAY AND FATHER IS AGED AND SORROWING. AYODHYA NEEDS YOU NOW!
DON'T ABANDON ME! NO ONE MATTERS TO ME MORE THAN YOU! ALL MY RELATIONSHIPS ARE CENTRED IN YOU.
RAM CLASPED LAKSHMAN TO HIS BOSOM AND ASKED HIM TO TAKE LEAVE OF HIS MOTHER.
GO, MY SON! IF RAM AND SITA GO TO THE FOREST, YOU MUST FOLLOW. SERVE THEM IN THOUGHT AND DEED.
LAKSHMAN BOWED TO HER, RELIEVED AT HER REACTION, AND LEAPT TOWARDS RAM AND SITA LIKE A DEER ESCAPING FROM A SNARE.


A HUGE CROWD HAD GATHERED AT THE GATES OF THE PALACE. INSTEAD OF THE JOY OF RAM'S CORONATION, THEY WERE FACED WITH THE SORROW OF HIS BANISHMENT.
FATHER, GIVE ME YOUR BLESSINGS AND DON'T BE DISMAYED.
MYSTERIOUS ARE THE WAYS OF THE LORD! WHO CAN COMPREHEND THEM?
DASHARATH BID FAREWELL TO SITA AND WARNED HER ABOUT THE FOREST. THE LADIES OF THE PALACE TRIED TO PERSUADE HER TO STAY BACK, BUT SHE WOULD NOT HEAR OF IT.
MEANWHILE, KAIKEYI FETCHED HERMIT'S ROBES AND VESSELS AND PLACED THEM BEFORE RAM.
YOU ARE AS DEAR TO THE KING AS LIFE ITSELF. HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO LET YOU GO. DO AS YOU THINK FIT.
OH, NO! WILL MY WRETCHED LIFE NEVER END!
CLAD IN HERMIT'S ROBES, RAM AND LAKSHMAN THEN WENT TO GURU VASISHTH'S PLACE TO TAKE HIS LEAVE, BUT THERE TOO THEY FOUND MANY PEOPLE GATHERED TO SEE THEM.
I BESEECH YOU ALL! IF YOU CARE FOR ME, LOOK AFTER THE WELFARE OF MY FATHER AND MOTHERS.
WHEN RAM BOWED HIS HEAD BEFORE VASISHTH AND BEGAN TO LEAVE AYODHYA...
...THERE WERE LOUD SOUNDS OF LAMENTATION IN THE TOWN. DASHARATH WAS AROUSED FROM HIS STUPOR.
SUMANTR, FOLLOW THEM WITH YOUR CHARIOTS. TAKE THEM TO THE FOREST. SHOW THEM AROUND. AND WHEN YOU RETURN, BRING BACK SITA WITH YOU.
I WILL DO SO, MY LORD!
SUMANTR RUSHED AT ONCE WITH A WELL-FITTED CHARIOT AND WENT TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY WHERE THE THREESOME HAD REACHED.
PLEASE LET ME LEAVE YOU UP TO THE EDGE OF THE FOREST. THE KING HAS ASKED ME TO DO SO!
THEN WE MUST OBEY HIS BIDDING.
RAM, SITA AND LAKSHMAN MOUNTED ON THE CHARIOT WITH HORDES OF CITIZENS FOLLOWING THEM ON FOOT.
RAM PERSUADED THEM TO TURN BACK, BUT THEY INSISTED ON FOLLOWING HIM. IN THE EVENING, RAM DECIDED TO HALT FOR THE NIGHT BY THE BANKS OF RIVER TAMASA.
HOW TIRED THEY MUST BE!
TIRED AFTER THE LONG JOURNEY, THE PEOPLE FOUND REFUGE ON THE BANKS AND WENT TO SLEEP.

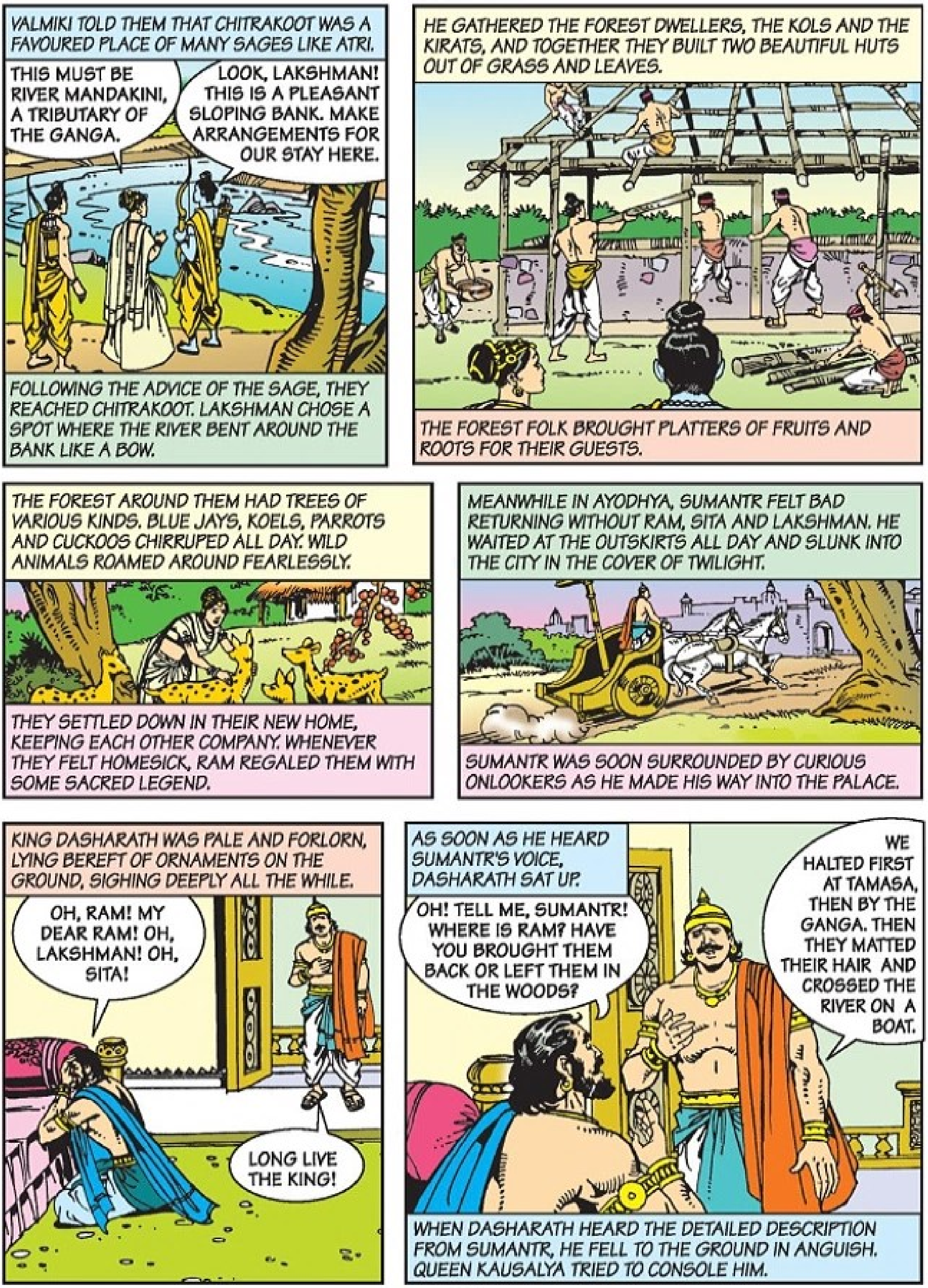

AFTER THREE TO FOUR HOURS, WHEN HE WAS SURE THAT THE PEOPLE WERE FAST ASLEEP, RAM SIGNALLED TO SUMANTR –
DEAR FRIEND, LET'S DRIVE AWAY NOW QUIETLY. MAKE SURE THE CHARIOT LEAVES NO TRACKS FOR THEM TO FOLLOW.
SUMANTR DROVE THE CHARIOT IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE TRACKS WERE OVERLAPPING AND CONFUSING.
IN THE MORNING, WHEN THE PEOPLE WOKE UP, THEY REALISED WHAT HAD HAPPENED.
THEY HAVE GONE!
LOOK AT THE TRACKS. THEY ARE ALL MIXED UP!
WE CAN'T EVEN FOLLOW THEM!
OH! RAM DID NOT WANT US TO FOLLOW HIM!
HAPLESS, THEY RETURNED HOME TO AYODHYA.
MEANWHILE, THE CHARIOT REACHED SHRINGAVERAPUR.
LET'S BOW TO THE HOLY GANGA!
THEY BATHED IN THE HOLY RIVER AND RAM TOLD THEM MANY LEGENDS ABOUT THE GANGA WHILE THEY RESTED ON ITS BANKS.
THE NEWS OF THEIR ARRIVAL REACHED GUHA, THE CHIEF OF THE NISHAD TRIBE. GATHERING GIFTS OF THE JUNGLE LIKE ROOTS AND FRUITS, HE CAME TO MEET RAM.
LORD, VISIT MY CITY AND HONOUR ME BY BEING MY GUEST.
I CANNOT DO SO, MY FRIEND. I MUST DWELL IN THE FOREST LIKE AN ASCETIC. I CAN'T LIVE IN A CITY OR VILLAGE FOR FOURTEEN YEARS.
GUHA REALISED THAT RAM HAD TO LIVE IN THE WILD, AND SO HE CHOSE A SHADY ASHOK TREE (SHEESHAM) AND MADE A BED WITH KUSHA GRASS AND SOFT LEAVES.
HE FASHIONED CUPS OUT OF TENDER LEAVES AND SERVED A MEAL OF THE CHOICEST FRUITS AND ROOTS TO RAM, SITA, LAKSHMAN AND SUMANTR.
AFTER THE EVENING PRAYERS, RAM RETIRED. LAKSHMAN SAT AT A DISTANCE, KEEPING VIGIL, WITH HIS BOW AND ARROW ALOFT.
GUHA PLACED HIS TRUSTWORTHY SOLDIERS ALL AROUND AND SAT BESIDES LAKSHMAN.
I CAN'T BEAR TO SEE RAM AND SITA ON THIS BED OF DRY GRASS! WHAT A CONTRAST IT IS TO THE OPULENCE AND COMFORT OF AYODHYA'S PALACE. THAT WICKED KAIKEYI IS THE CAUSE OF ALL THIS SORROW.
NO ONE IS THE CAUSE OF ANOTHER'S SORROW! WE ALL REAP THE FRUIT OF OUR ACTIONS.

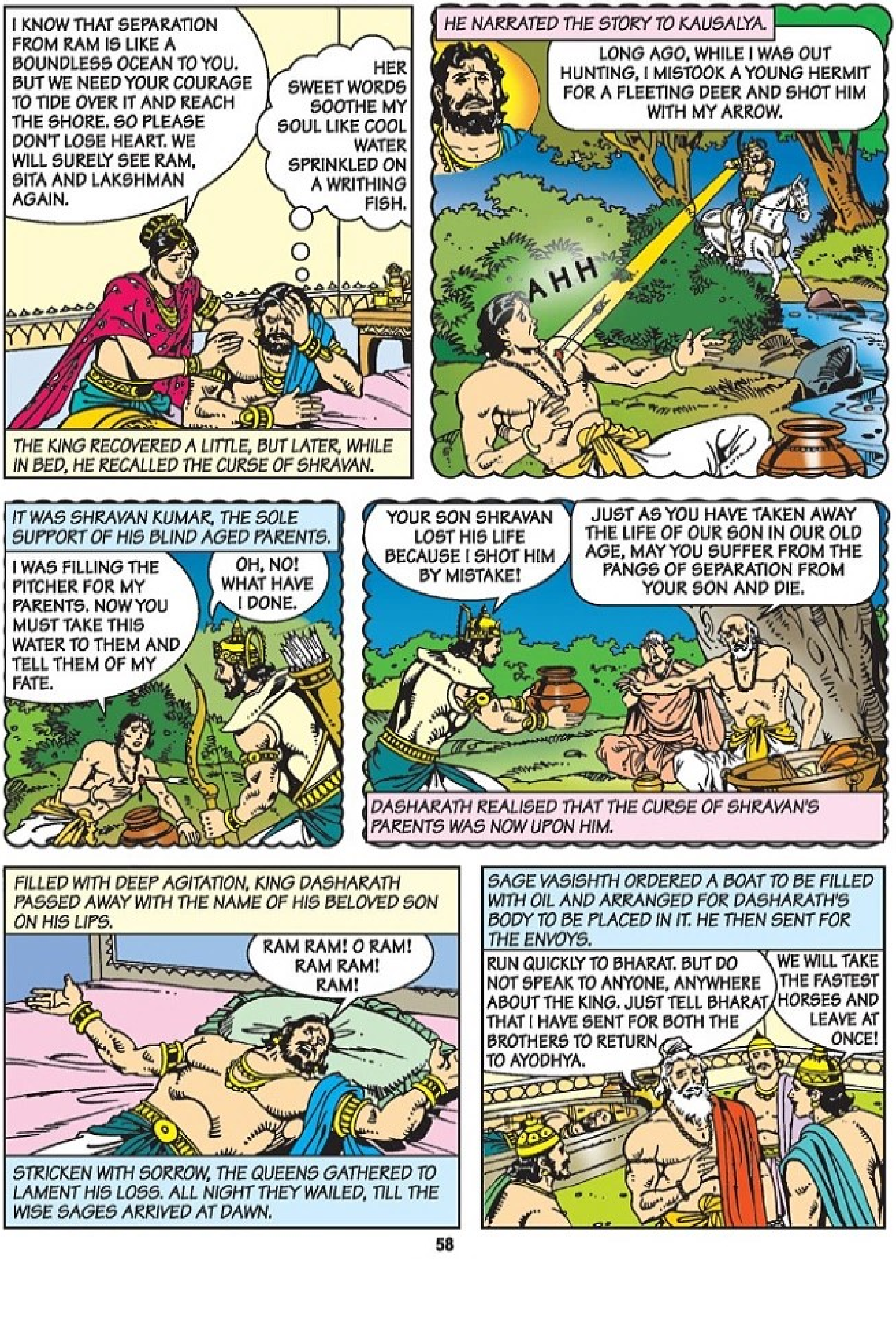

IN THE MORNING, RAM ASKED FOR THE SAP OF THE BANYAN TREE. AFTER BATHING, HE AND LAKSHMAN MATTED THE HAIR ON THEIR HEAD WITH THE BANYAN SAP. THE SIGHT OF THE ASCETIC KNOTS ON THEIR HEAD MADE SUMANTR WEEP.
YOUR FATHER HAD ASKED ME TO BRING YOU BACK TO AYODHYA AFTER SHOWING YOU THE FOREST AND BATHING IN THE GANGA. NOW I WILL DO AS YOU SAY.
MY ANCESTORS ENDURED MANY HARDSHIPS, BUT DID NOT STRAY FROM THE PATH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.
AS THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, AGAMAS, VEDAS AND PURANAS DECLARE, THERE IS NOTHING GREATER THAN ONE'S DUTY. I AM ABLE TO FULFIL MY DUTY WITHOUT MUCH ADO. SO, GO BACK AND TELL MY FATHER NOT TO GRIEVE.
WELL, IN THAT CASE, THE KING ASKED ME TO BRING SITA BACK. HE SAID WE SHOULD BOTH PERSUADE HER TO RETURN.
BUT SITA WAS NOT WILLING TO RETURN.
IF YOU GO BACK, IT WILL MAKE EVERYONE HAPPY.
NO! I CANNOT GO! HOW CAN YOU SEPARATE A SHADOW FROM ITS SUBSTANCE? CAN THE MOONLIGHT FORSAKE THE MOON? BESIDES, I HAVE NO FEAR OF THE FOREST WHEN I HAVE TWO VALIANT WARRIORS TO PROTECT ME!
AT LAST SUMANTR WAS PERSUADED TO DRIVE OFF ALONE IN THE CHARIOT.
RAM THEN WENT IN SEARCH OF A BOAT TO CROSS THE GANGA. HE MET A BOATMAN.
CAN YOU FERRY US ACROSS, BOATMAN?
NO, NO! I CANNOT DO SO! I HAVE HEARD ABOUT YOU AND YOUR PROWESS. THE DUST OF YOUR FEET TURNED A ROCK INTO A HERMIT'S WIFE.
MY WOODEN BOAT IS NOT AS HARD AS A ROCK. WHAT IF IT TURNS INTO A WOMAN? MY BOAT IS MY LIFE, MY LIVELIHOOD! I'LL BE LOST WITHOUT IT!
BUT WE MUST CROSS THE RIVER!
IN THAT CASE, ALLOW ME TO WASH YOUR FEET! LET LAKSHMAN SHOOT ME WITH HIS ARROWS, IF HE WILL. BUT UNLESS I CLEANSE YOUR FEET, I WILL NOT FERRY YOU ACROSS THE RIVER.
ALL RIGHT! DO WHAT YOU MUST TO PRESERVE YOUR PRECIOUS BOAT.
RAM SMILED AND AGREED TO HIS STRANGE REQUEST. WITH LOVING CARE, THE BOATMAN BATHED AND DRIED RAM'S FEET.


HE FERRIED THEM ACROSS THE GANGA TO THE SANDY BANK ON THE OTHER SIDE.
OH! I HAVE NOTHING TO GIVE HIM AS PAYMENT.
HERE IS YOUR FEE.
NO, I WON'T ACCEPT IT. YOU MAY PAY ON YOUR RETURN JOURNEY.
RAM MADE A CLAY IMAGE OF SHIV AND PRAYED BEFORE IT. SITA BOWED TO THE CELESTIAL RIVER GANGA AND SOUGHT HER BLESSING.
GRANT THAT I MAY RETURN SAFELY WITH MY HUSBAND AND HIS BROTHER AND OFFER MY PRAYER TO YOU AGAIN!
RAM THEN ASKED GUHA TO RETURN TO HIS PLACE.
BUT GUHA WAS RELUCTANT TO LEAVE.
LET ME BE BY YOUR SIDE FOR A FEW DAYS. I WILL MAKE A LOVELY HUT OF LEAVES WHEREVER YOU GO. AFTER SHOWING YOU AROUND I WILL RETURN, I PROMISE YOU!
ALL RIGHT! COME WITH US FOR A WHILE.
THEY ROAMED THROUGH THE FOREST, SLEEPING UNDER THE TREES AT NIGHT, TILL THEY REACHED THE HOLY CITY OF PRAYAG.
THIS HOLY CITY IS WHERE GANGA, YAMUNA AND SARASWATI MEET AT THE TRIVENI. LET US BATHE AT THE CONFLUENCE.
THEY PERFORMED THE PRESCRIBED RITUALS AT THE DIVINE SPOT.
THEN THEY VISITED THE HERMITAGE OF SAGE BHARADWAJ. RAM WAS ABOUT TO LIE PROSTRATED BEFORE THE GREAT SAGE, BUT HE LIFTED HIM UP IN AN EMBRACE.
HERE ARE SOME FRUITS, ROOTS AND SPROUTS FOR YOU. I AM HONOURED BY YOUR VISIT.
OH! IT IS WE WHO ARE HONOURED FOR WHO HAS NOT HEARD OF YOUR COUNTLESS FEATS!
MANY HERMITS AND SAGES, STUDENTS AND ASCETICS, GATHERED TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF THE VISITORS.
AFTER STAYING OVERNIGHT AT THE ASHRAM, RAM ASKED SAGE BHARADWAJ–
WE HAVE TO SPEND MANY YEARS IN THE FOREST. CAN YOU SHOW US THE WAY?
ONE OF MY PUPILS WILL GUIDE YOU.
WHO WILL GO WITH THEM?
I WILL!
FIFTY STUDENTS EAGERLY VOLUNTEERED. BUT THE SAGE SELECTED ONLY FOUR OF THEM TO GUIDE RAM.

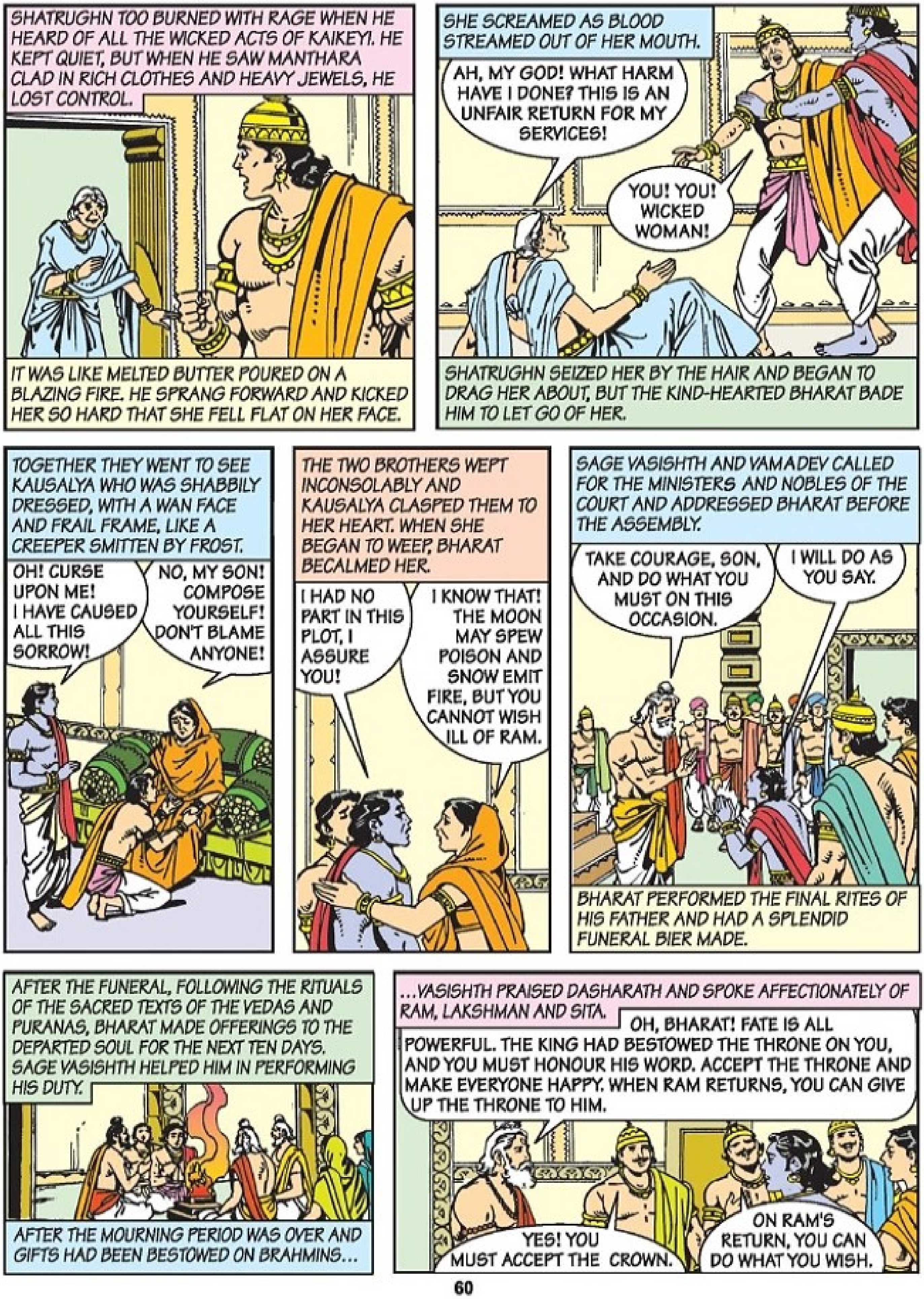


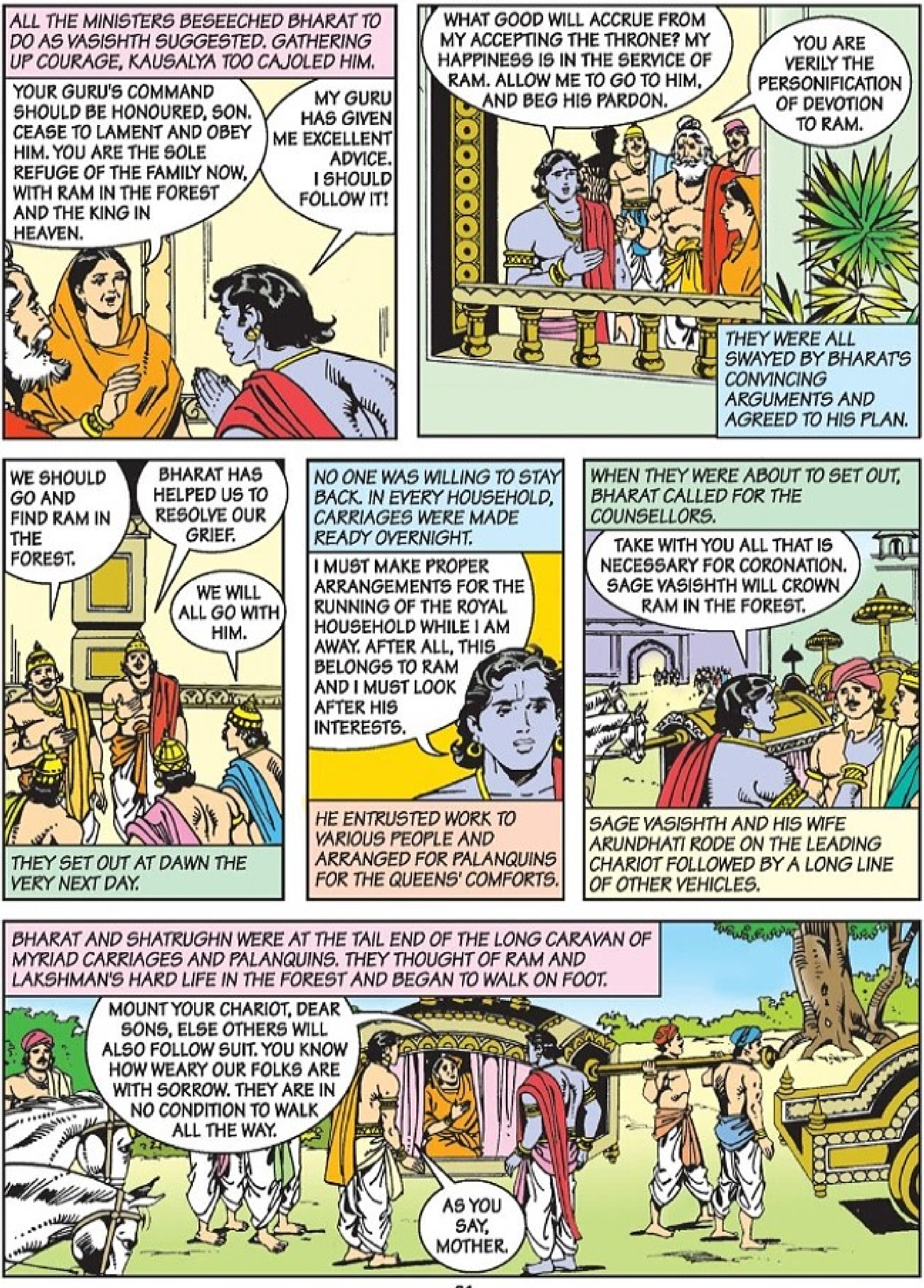
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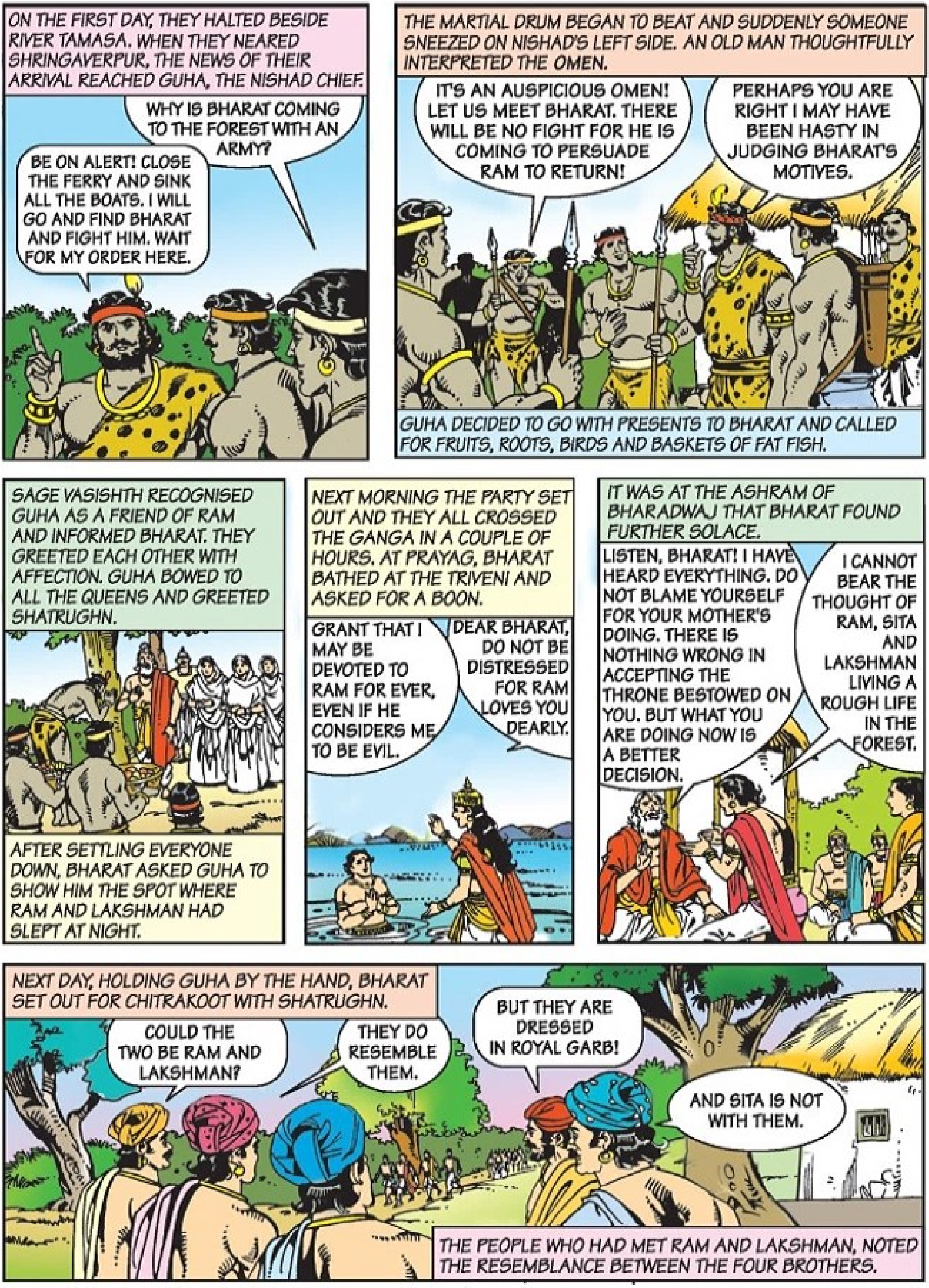

VALMIKI TOLD THEM THAT CHITRAKOOT WAS A FAVOURED PLACE OF MANY SAGES LIKE ATRI.
THIS MUST BE RIVER MANDAKINI, A TRIBUTARY OF THE GANGA.
LOOK, LAKSHMAN! THIS IS A PLEASANT SLOPING BANK. MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR OUR STAY HERE.
FOLLOWING THE ADVICE OF THE SAGE, THEY REACHED CHITRAKOOT. LAKSHMAN CHOSE A SPOT WHERE THE RIVER BENT AROUND THE BANK LIKE A BOW.
HE GATHERED THE FOREST DWELLERS, THE KOLS AND THE KIRATS, AND TOGETHER THEY BUILT TWO BEAUTIFUL HUTS OUT OF GRASS AND LEAVES.
THE FOREST FOLK BROUGHT PLATTERS OF FRUITS AND ROOTS FOR THEIR GUESTS.
THE FOREST AROUND THEM HAD TREES OF VARIOUS KINDS. BLUE JAYS, KOELS, PARROTS AND CUCKOOS CHIRRUPED ALL DAY. WILD ANIMALS ROAMED AROUND FEARLESSLY.
THEY SETTLED DOWN IN THEIR NEW HOME, KEEPING EACH OTHER COMPANY. WHENEVER THEY FELT HOMESICK, RAM REGALED THEM WITH SOME SACRED LEGEND.
MEANWHILE IN AYODHYA, SUMANTR FELT BAD RETURNING WITHOUT RAM, SITA AND LAKSHMAN. HE WAITED AT THE OUTSKIRTS ALL DAY AND SLUNK INTO THE CITY IN THE COVER OF TWILIGHT.
SUMANTR WAS SOON SURROUNDED BY CURIOUS ONLOOKERS AS HE MADE HIS WAY INTO THE PALACE.
KING DASHARATH WAS PALE AND FORLORN, LYING BEREFT OF ORNAMENTS ON THE GROUND, SIGHING DEEPLY ALL THE WHILE.
OH, RAM! MY DEAR RAM! OH, LAKSHMAN! OH, SITA!
LONG LIVE THE KING!
AS SOON AS HE HEARD SUMANTR'S VOICE, DASHARATH SAT UP.
OH! TELL ME, SUMANTR! WHERE IS RAM? HAVE YOU BROUGHT THEM BACK OR LEFT THEM IN THE WOODS?
WE HALTED FIRST AT TAMASA, THEN BY THE GANGA. THEN THEY MATTED THEIR HAIR AND CROSSED THE RIVER ON A BOAT.
WHEN DASHARATH HEARD THE DETAILED DESCRIPTION FROM SUMANTR, HE FELL TO THE GROUND IN ANGUISH. QUEEN KAUSALYA TRIED TO CONSOLE HIM.


I KNOW THAT SEPARATION FROM RAM IS LIKE A BOUNDLESS OCEAN TO YOU. BUT WE NEED YOUR COURAGE TO TIDE OVER IT AND REACH THE SHORE. SO PLEASE DON'T LOSE HEART. WE WILL SURELY SEE RAM, SITA AND LAKSHMAN AGAIN.
HER SWEET WORDS SOOTHE MY SOUL LIKE COOL WATER SPRINKLED ON A WRITHING FISH.
THE KING RECOVERED A LITTLE, BUT LATER, WHILE IN BED, HE RECALLED THE CURSE OF SHRAVAN.
HE NARRATED THE STORY TO KAUSALYA.
LONG AGO, WHILE I WAS OUT HUNTING, I MISTOOK A YOUNG HERMIT FOR A FLEETING DEER AND SHOT HIM WITH MY ARROW.
AHH
IT WAS SHRAVAN KUMAR, THE SOLE SUPPORT OF HIS BLIND AGED PARENTS.
I WAS FILLING THE PITCHER FOR MY PARENTS. NOW YOU MUST TAKE THIS WATER TO THEM AND TELL THEM OF MY FATE.
OH, NO! WHAT HAVE I DONE.
YOUR SON SHRAVAN LOST HIS LIFE BECAUSE I SHOT HIM BY MISTAKE!
JUST AS YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY THE LIFE OF OUR SON IN OUR OLD AGE, MAY YOU SUFFER FROM THE PANGS OF SEPARATION FROM YOUR SON AND DIE.
DASHARATH REALISED THAT THE CURSE OF SHRAVAN'S PARENTS WAS NOW UPON HIM.
FILLED WITH DEEP AGITATION, KING DASHARATH PASSED AWAY WITH THE NAME OF HIS BELOVED SON ON HIS LIPS.
RAM RAM! O RAM! RAM RAM! RAM!
STRICKEN WITH SORROW, THE QUEENS GATHERED TO LAMENT HIS LOSS. ALL NIGHT THEY WAILED, TILL THE WISE SAGES ARRIVED AT DAWN.
SAGE VASISHTH ORDERED A BOAT TO BE FILLED WITH OIL AND ARRANGED FOR DASHARATH'S BODY TO BE PLACED IN IT. HE THEN SENT FOR THE ENVOYS.
RUN QUICKLY TO BHARAT. BUT DO NOT SPEAK TO ANYONE, ANYWHERE ABOUT THE KING. JUST TELL BHARAT THAT I HAVE SENT FOR BOTH THE BROTHERS TO RETURN TO AYODHYA.
WE WILL TAKE THE FASTEST HORSES AND LEAVE AT ONCE!


BHARAT AND SHATRUGHN STARTED FOR AYODHYA AS SOON AS THEY GOT THEIR GURU'S MESSAGE. HIS HEART WAS UNEASY AND HE SAW ILL OMENS ALL ALONG THE WAY. ON REACHING AYODHYA, PEOPLE GREETED HIM WITH POLITE SILENCE.
OH! MY BELOVED SON HAS COME! I MUST WELCOME HIM.
BHARAT NOTICED THAT THE ENTIRE HOUSEHOLD WAS WOEBEGONE. ONLY KAIKEYI WAS FULL OF CHEER.
SO, HOW IS EVERYONE AT MY MOTHER'S HOUSE? DID YOU HAVE A GOOD TIME? ARE THEY ALL WELL?
YES! EVERYONE IS FINE! BUT TELL ME WHERE ARE RAM AND LAKSHMAN? WHERE ARE MY FATHER AND THE OTHER QUEENS?
KAIKEYI QUICKLY FILLED HER EYES WITH FALSE TEARS.
OH, MY SON. WITH MANTHARA'S HELP I HAD ARRANGED EVERYTHING PERFECTLY. BUT MY PLANS WERE UPSET AND THE KING DEPARTED TO HEAVEN.
OH, FATHER! OH, FATHER!
BHARAT WAS OVERWHELMED TO HEAR THE NEWS AND FELL TO THE GROUND IN GRIEF.
I COULD NOT EVEN SEE YOU AT YOUR DEATH BED! YOU DID NOT EVEN WAIT TO ENTRUST ME TO RAM.
BHARAT COLLECTED HIMSELF WITH MUCH EFFORT AND ASKED KAIKEYI ABOUT THE CAUSE OF DASHARATH'S DEATH.
KAIKEYI CHEERFULLY RELATED ALL THAT SHE HAD DONE, AS IF POURING POISON INTO A TERRIBLE WOUND SHE HAD INFLICTED.
OH, NO! I AM THE CAUSE OF ALL THESE TERRIBLE EVENTS.
HE STOOD STILL AND STUPEFIED AT THE THOUGHT AND COULD NOT UTTER A WORD.
KAIKEYI TRIED TO COMFORT HIM.
DON'T GRIEVE OVER YOUR FATHER. HE LIVED A RICH REWARDING LIFE AND HAS GONE TO HEAVEN.
AHH! YOU WICKED WOMAN! YOU HAVE WRECKED AND RUINED OUR FAMILY.
BHARAT SPOKE HARSH WORDS TO KAIKEYI AND RUED THE FACT THAT SHE WAS HIS MOTHER.


SHATRUGHN TOO BURNED WITH RAGE WHEN HE HEARD OF ALL THE WICKED ACTS OF KAIKEYI. HE KEPT QUIET, BUT WHEN HE SAW MANTHARA CLAD IN RICH CLOTHES AND HEAVY JEWELS, HE LOST CONTROL.
IT WAS LIKE MELTED BUTTER POURED ON A BLAZING FIRE. HE SPRANG FORWARD AND KICKED HER SO HARD THAT SHE FELL FLAT ON HER FACE.
SHE SCREAMED AS BLOOD STREAMED OUT OF HER MOUTH.
AH, MY GOD! WHAT HARM HAVE I DONE? THIS IS AN UNFAIR RETURN FOR MY SERVICES!
YOU! YOU! WICKED WOMAN!
SHATRUGHN SEIZED HER BY THE HAIR AND BEGAN TO DRAG HER ABOUT, BUT THE KIND-HEARTED BHARAT BADE HIM TO LET GO OF HER.
TOGETHER THEY WENT TO SEE KAUSALYA WHO WAS SHABBILY DRESSED, WITH A WAN FACE AND FRAIL FRAME, LIKE A CREEPER SMITTEN BY FROST.
OH! CURSE UPON ME! I HAVE CAUSED ALL THIS SORROW!
NO, MY SON! COMPOSE YOURSELF! DON'T BLAME ANYONE!
THE TWO BROTHERS WEPT INCONSOLABLY AND KAUSALYA CLASPED THEM TO HER HEART. WHEN SHE BEGAN TO WEEP, BHARAT BECALMED HER.
I HAD NO PART IN THIS PLOT, I ASSURE YOU!
I KNOW THAT! THE MOON MAY SPEW POISON AND SNOW EMIT FIRE, BUT YOU CANNOT WISH ILL OF RAM.
SAGE VASISHTH AND VAMADEV CALLED FOR THE MINISTERS AND NOBLES OF THE COURT AND ADDRESSED BHARAT BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY.
TAKE COURAGE, SON, AND DO WHAT YOU MUST ON THIS OCCASION.
I WILL DO AS YOU SAY.
BHARAT PERFORMED THE FINAL RITES OF HIS FATHER AND HAD A SPLENDID FUNERAL BIER MADE.
AFTER THE FUNERAL, FOLLOWING THE RITUALS OF THE SACRED TEXTS OF THE VEDAS AND PURANAS, BHARAT MADE OFFERINGS TO THE DEPARTED SOUL FOR THE NEXT TEN DAYS. SAGE VASISHTH HELPED HIM IN PERFORMING HIS DUTY.
AFTER THE MOURNING PERIOD WAS OVER AND GIFTS HAD BEEN BESTOWED ON BRAHMINS…
…VASISHTH PRAISED DASHARATH AND SPOKE AFFECTIONATELY OF RAM, LAKSHMAN AND SITA.
OH, BHARAT! FATE IS ALL POWERFUL. THE KING HAD BESTOWED THE THRONE ON YOU, AND YOU MUST HONOUR HIS WORD. ACCEPT THE THRONE AND MAKE EVERYONE HAPPY. WHEN RAM RETURNS, YOU CAN GIVE UP THE THRONE TO HIM.
YES! YOU MUST ACCEPT THE CROWN.
ON RAM'S RETURN, YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU WISH.


ALL THE MINISTERS BESEECHED BHARAT TO DO AS VASISHTH SUGGESTED. GATHERING UP COURAGE, KAUSALYA TOO CAJOLED HIM.
YOUR GURU'S COMMAND SHOULD BE HONOURED, SON. CEASE TO LAMENT AND OBEY HIM. YOU ARE THE SOLE REFUGE OF THE FAMILY NOW, WITH RAM IN THE FOREST AND THE KING IN HEAVEN.
MY GURU HAS GIVEN ME EXCELLENT ADVICE. I SHOULD FOLLOW IT!
WHAT GOOD WILL ACCRUE FROM MY ACCEPTING THE THRONE? MY HAPPINESS IS IN THE SERVICE OF RAM. ALLOW ME TO GO TO HIM, AND BEG HIS PARDON.
YOU ARE VERILY THE PERSONIFICATION OF DEVOTION TO RAM.
THEY WERE ALL SWAYED BY BHARAT'S CONVINCING ARGUMENTS AND AGREED TO HIS PLAN.
WE SHOULD GO AND FIND RAM IN THE FOREST.
BHARAT HAS HELPED US TO RESOLVE OUR GRIEF.
WE WILL ALL GO WITH HIM.
THEY SET OUT AT DAWN THE VERY NEXT DAY.
NO ONE WAS WILLING TO STAY BACK. IN EVERY HOUSEHOLD, CARRIAGES WERE MADE READY OVERNIGHT.
I MUST MAKE PROPER ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE RUNNING OF THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD WHILE I AM AWAY. AFTER ALL, THIS BELONGS TO RAM AND I MUST LOOK AFTER HIS INTERESTS.
HE ENTRUSTED WORK TO VARIOUS PEOPLE AND ARRANGED FOR PALANQUINS FOR THE QUEENS' COMFORTS.
WHEN THEY WERE ABOUT TO SET OUT, BHARAT CALLED FOR THE COUNSELLORS.
TAKE WITH YOU ALL THAT IS NECESSARY FOR CORONATION. SAGE VASISHTH WILL CROWN RAM IN THE FOREST.
SAGE VASISHTH AND HIS WIFE ARUNDHATI RODE ON THE LEADING CHARIOT FOLLOWED BY A LONG LINE OF OTHER VEHICLES.
BHARAT AND SHATRUGHN WERE AT THE TAIL END OF THE LONG CARAVAN OF MYRIAD CARRIAGES AND PALANQUINS. THEY THOUGHT OF RAM AND LAKSHMAN'S HARD LIFE IN THE FOREST AND BEGAN TO WALK ON FOOT.
MOUNT YOUR CHARIOT, DEAR SONS, ELSE OTHERS WILL ALSO FOLLOW SUIT. YOU KNOW HOW WEARY OUR FOLKS ARE WITH SORROW. THEY ARE IN NO CONDITION TO WALK ALL THE WAY.
AS YOU SAY, MOTHER.


ON THE FIRST DAY, THEY HALTED BESIDE RIVER TAMASA. WHEN THEY NEARED SHRINGAVERPUR, THE NEWS OF THEIR ARRIVAL REACHED GUHA, THE NISHAD CHIEF.
WHY IS BHARAT COMING TO THE FOREST WITH AN ARMY?
BE ON ALERT! CLOSE THE FERRY AND SINK ALL THE BOATS. I WILL GO AND FIND BHARAT AND FIGHT HIM. WAIT FOR MY ORDER HERE.
THE MARTIAL DRUM BEGAN TO BEAT AND SUDDENLY SOMEONE SNEEZED ON NISHAD'S LEFT SIDE. AN OLD MAN THOUGHTFULLY INTERPRETED THE OMEN.
IT'S AN AUSPICIOUS OMEN! LET US MEET BHARAT. THERE WILL BE NO FIGHT FOR HE IS COMING TO PERSUADE RAM TO RETURN!
PERHAPS YOU ARE RIGHT I MAY HAVE BEEN HASTY IN JUDGING BHARAT'S MOTIVES.
GUHA DECIDED TO GO WITH PRESENTS TO BHARAT AND CALLED FOR FRUITS, ROOTS, BIRDS AND BASKETS OF FAT FISH.
SAGE VASISHTH RECOGNISED GUHA AS A FRIEND OF RAM AND INFORMED BHARAT. THEY GREETED EACH OTHER WITH AFFECTION. GUHA BOWED TO ALL THE QUEENS AND GREETED SHATRUGHN.
AFTER SETTLING EVERYONE DOWN, BHARAT ASKED GUHA TO SHOW HIM THE SPOT WHERE RAM AND LAKSHMAN HAD SLEPT AT NIGHT.
NEXT MORNING THE PARTY SET OUT AND THEY ALL CROSSED THE GANGA IN A COUPLE OF HOURS. AT PRAYAG, BHARAT BATHED AT THE TRIVENI AND ASKED FOR A BOON.
GRANT THAT I MAY BE DEVOTED TO RAM FOR EVER, EVEN IF HE CONSIDERS ME TO BE EVIL.
DEAR BHARAT, DO NOT BE DISTRESSED FOR RAM LOVES YOU DEARLY.
IT WAS AT THE ASHRAM OF BHARADWAJ THAT BHARAT FOUND FURTHER SOLACE.
LISTEN, BHARAT! I HAVE HEARD EVERYTHING. DO NOT BLAME YOURSELF FOR YOUR MOTHER'S DOING. THERE IS NOTHING WRONG IN ACCEPTING THE THRONE BESTOWED ON YOU. BUT WHAT YOU ARE DOING NOW IS A BETTER DECISION.
I CANNOT BEAR THE THOUGHT OF RAM, SITA AND LAKSHMAN LIVING A ROUGH LIFE IN THE FOREST.
NEXT DAY, HOLDING GUHA BY THE HAND, BHARAT SET OUT FOR CHITRAKOOT WITH SHATRUGHN.
COULD THE TWO BE RAM AND LAKSHMAN?
THEY DO RESEMBLE THEM.
BUT THEY ARE DRESSED IN ROYAL GARB!
AND SITA IS NOT WITH THEM.
THE PEOPLE WHO HAD MET RAM AND LAKSHMAN, NOTED THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN THE FOUR BROTHERS.


AT CHITRAKOOT, RAM WAS BUSY WITH HIS MORNING PRAYERS WHEN HE SAW A CLOUD OF DUST IN THE NORTH. SOON, THE FOREST DWELLERS TOLD HIM ABOUT BHARAT'S ARRIVAL WITH AN ARMY.
FORGIVE ME, BROTHER, IF I SPEAK OUT OF TURN. YOU CANNOT THINK ILL OF ANYONE. BUT I AM SURE BHARAT AND SHATRUGHN HAVE BROUGHT AN ARMY TO OVERPOWER YOU WHILE YOU ARE ALONE IN THE FOREST. BUT HE IS MISTAKEN. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.
FILLED WITH RAGE AND A FIGHTING SPIRIT, LAKSHMAN PICKED UP HIS BOW AND ARROW TO CONFRONT BHARAT.
I WILL TEACH HIM A LESSON! I WILL OVERTHROW THEM AND THEIR ARMY, I DO SWEAR!
YOU MAY BE RIGHT IN FEELING THAT ROYAL POWER CAN TURN HEADS. BUT THERE IS NO ONE AS GOOD AS BHARAT IN THE ENTIRE WORLD.
MEANWHILE, LEAVING THE OTHERS ON THE BANK OF RIVER MANDAKINI, BHARAT WENT AHEAD WITH SHATRUGHN AND GUHA TOWARDS RAM'S DWELLING. AS SOON AS HE SAW RAM AND LAKSHMAN, BHARAT FELL PROSTRATE ON THE GROUND.
SAVE ME. SAVE ME.
BHARAT IS BOWING TO YOU!
AS SOON AS HE HEARD THESE WORDS, RAM RAN IN AFFECTIONATE HASTE, SCATTERING HIS BOW, ARROWS AND QUIVER AND UPPER GARMENT IN ALL DIRECTIONS.
RAM RAISED BHARAT UP AND CLASPED HIM TO HIS BOSOM.
IT WAS A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES. HOW CAN ONE FIND WORDS TO DESCRIBE THIS JOYOUS REUNION?
RAM AND BHARAT WERE LOCKED IN AN EMBRACE, OVERFLOWING WITH AFFECTION, UNAWARE OF THEIR MIND, REASON, UNDERSTANDING AND THEIR VERY SELVES.

रघुकुल रीति सदा चलि आई
प्राण जाहुँ बरु बचनु न जाई

In the family of the Raghus, there has always been the tradition of upholding the truth, even at the cost of one's life.

